

## The Making of Places in the City. Gentrification and Globalization in the City Center of Cluj

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*In this work I examine the issue of gentrification of a city centre and its effects on the relations between spaces and places, using my own observations in Cluj's city centre. There have been numerous discussions about the transformations of eastern (or in my case more precisely south-eastern European) cities and the alleged shift from specific places to 'globalized', market-cultural spaces, transforming a unique city centre into an anonymous copy of other spaces. I will first discuss established ideas about the interrelations between these notions and, in a second part, illustrate these in consideration of my own observation.*

Before the actual observation, while reflecting upon theoretical assumptions of the relation between spaces and places in a gentrified environment, my focus has been on the transformation from *place to space*, on the globalising effects of a city centres' gentrification and the evolvement of a space in which, as Richard Sennett puts it, "everyone is alien to any other one, but they are all alien in the same way".

The first allegation made by me, keeping in mind what is assumed to be 'common-knowledge'<sup>1</sup> about socialist city structures was, that today's centre had not served as the cities' centre during the communist regime and had, as for example many eastern-German city centres, been completely abandoned. Based upon this allegation I assumed that the centres' gentrification had entirely changed its function from an abandoned place to the midpoint of the city. In fact, as newer research upon this issue show, faraway from the socialist rhetoric the centre of Cluj had always been the cities centre - well before 1989. As Petrovici (2007) shows, the centre was, during the communist era, in the majority occupied by citizens working for the state, serving as a centre for people in charge of control by means of bureaucratically controlling others, as well as easily being controlled by the state at the same time. The centre was in its function as the bureaucratic midpoint, vital for workers.

Subsequently, the change in fact did not occur essentially regarding the city centres *function*, but regarding its specific way of *use*, which naturally had changed to a large extent. While before '89 - and quite a while after that as well - the centre of Cluj had been a place of people representing the *state control*, it nowadays is - at least from its outward appearance - a place orientated towards consumerism, a *market oriented consumerism* at any rate, be it leisure-time offers, shopping opportunities or travel agencies, tourist offices and the like.

My second allegation, based upon on the first one, was that the groups using the city centre in any possible way would be quite homogeneous - a consumer-oriented clientele owning enough money to use the centre in its newly defined meaning. According to the change recently taken place, I supposed there would be a lot of people rather excluded from the city centre, simply because by no means they would be able to use the centre in its supposed way.

<sup>1</sup> What I refer to here is the rhetoric of equality, the well-known idioms of brotherhood and indifference, which led to the allegation that in socialist cities the -still existent- classes would live door to door with each other, preferably in newly constructed satellite towns.