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# Place making and tourism development in the Old Town in Krakow (Poland): discourse about communist past and economic growth

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## Abstract

In general, tourist places are a juxtaposition of different social and economic practices of different temporal scales, e.g. temporary, economic nature of tourism intersects with a daily lives of local residents. Furthermore, tourism places are mainly a result of a long-lasting political process and they are filled with ideologies. Therefore, space in tourism context should be seen as an arena for mediation of different forms of social interactions and a struggle over access to resources, land and territory. In this process of transforming space into tourism destination, it is important to understand the meanings and values different social groups attach to the landscape which often come into competition over the way tourist destinations should be developed and are subordinated to power relations and modes of accumulation. The post socialist cities in the last decade of XX century experienced a transition from 'state-socialism to global capitalism' which resulted in extraordinary spread of neoliberalism. It encompassed all aspects of economy, including tourism. The global forces have had a great influence on the socio-spatial shape of cities in Central and Eastern Europe which became an arena 'of free market play for space'. The idea of sustainable development was not on the political agenda of many transforming governments, rather the goal was to make a clear break from the totalitarian past which used urban environments as an instrument to suppress freedom of individuals.

Urban spaces were reshaped by private investors according to their utmost interests which led to uncontrolled urban sprawl, random densification and transformation of public spaces. Large Polish cities are an excellent example of the transformation, which is certainly fast but not necessarily complementary and logical. Such transformation can be characterized among many other by commercialization of the city centers. As transformation progressed, the function of public spaces, especially in the city centers, has changed in Poland. With the appearance of office buildings, hotels and shopping malls, the main goal of such redeveloped spaces was to attract businesses, tourists and residents from other parts of the city who could afford to spend there a couple of hours. In particular, a profit oriented nature of tourism led to uncontrolled spread of tourist oriented activities and constrained the lives of residents

Therefore, the aim of the paper is thus to analyze place making practices in Krakow (Poland), an urban tourist destination, whose historical city center is inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Site. Historical and socio-economic context and references to the communist past which

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limited the freedom economic activities, frame the current discourse and actions of the policy makers and lead to transformation of the urban space, change of place meanings and progressive tourismification.

As a result, since 1990 the space of the Old Town in Krakow experienced a rapid change in the structure of property use. The functions of individual buildings as well as the entire neighborhood had been redefined. All the shops and services serving the residents slowly but steadily started to leave the Old Town. In the 80ties the Old Town was filled with grocery shops, butchers, fruit and vegetable stalls, however after transformation they have all disappeared. The opening of the shopping mall just next to the train station, 500 meters walking from the Main Market Square, as well as massive constructions of shopping malls in each neighborhood, resulted in disappearing of shops from the area of the Old Town. Currently, 40 % of premises are occupied by horeca. In general, the changes were directed to attract to the Old Town richer, mainly international clients, meaning tourists.

Such changes were possible due to favorable policies. Even today, almost 30 years after the communist era, the neoliberal approach dominates policy making. The policy decisions are most of the time framed in relation to the constraining communist past and propose the intensification of tourism activities within the Old Town to simultaneously intensify tourism-related profit. It shows that tourism planning in Krakow is first and foremost directed at increasing the global competitiveness of the city. The production of space is driven primarily by the coalition of powerful landlords and business owners who are able to influence local politics. This leads to the lack of willingness to recognize the limits of acceptable change among local population and pushes tourism planning into exploitation of local resources for the benefit of economic gains. Consequently, it is most likely that social decay and transformation of the Old Town into *theme park* (as indicated by the interviewee) will progress.

Key words: tourism policies, space transformation, economic growth, neoliberal discourse

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