
The commodification of public spaces in Hungary

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Abstract

Public spaces have complex and crucial role in everyday life: they are the spaces of everyday encounters and several activities (Iveson, 2007; Van Kempen – Wissink, 2014). They also the sources and manifestations of identities and commemoration: they are locations of historic events, memorials and monuments. The names of public spaces are also connected to the identities and histories of various social groups. Furthermore, public spaces are also spaces of representation: different groups, values, ideologies can represent themselves in public space, making themselves visible in society (Mitchell, 2003). Thus, public spaces have significant role in democracies and its production is a highly contested phenomena. Despite its significance, "real", accessible and open public space can be considered as a utopia or an ideal type of urban space (Harvey, 2000), since in most cases they are regulated, and some values, ideologies and interests have more influence on the production of public space than others. In relation to this, the democratic dimensions of public spaces are under constant threat because of competing ideologies, values and interests. The commodification of public space is one of the most controversial transformations of urban societies. In these processes the capital interests have growing influence on the transformation on the use, the (re)naming and development of public spaces - overshadowing the community content and democratic dimension of public space. The paper presents the different dimensions of the commodification processes of Hungarian public spaces - from the place names to the use and development of spaces. I present the naming practices and the role of companies in them. In addition, the regulations and changing development aims will also be analysed. The research is based on discourse analysis and interviews with key actors. According to my results, the commodification of public spaces is a widespread process in Hungary and it is usually connected to gentrification processes and investments.

Keywords: Hungary, Budapest, public space, commodification, conflicts, urban geography

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