

Extended Abstract

This thesis addresses the globalizing urban waterfront in Bratislava. It aims to unravel the key logics driving the decision-making processes behind waterfront re-development in the Slovak capital. I investigate the infiltration of the capitalist logics into a transforming institutional environment unfolding from the post-socialist transition. This is being done through a distinction between the capitalist and the territorial logics of power (Jessop, 1999; Harvey, 2005).

Across the globe, waterfront re-development has become the urban response to inner-city decline, and the increasing inter-urban competitiveness in today's neoliberal capitalism. The origins of waterfront transformations are here framed as an urban manifestation of geographically uneven logics of capital put into motion by the crisis of Atlantic Fordism (Smith, 1990; Jessop, 2000). The capital switching into the build-up environment (Harvey, 1978; 2005), is temporarily fixed on urban waterfronts through decisions made on multiple scales (Brenner, 2001). Various types of 'extraverted' strategies such as the Ecosystem approach (Laidley, 2007), a construction of megaprojects & an organisation of mega-events (Orueta & Fainstein 2009), or localization of transnational circulations of stararchitects (Alaily-Mattar et.al. 2018), promised to deliver a new panacea for local urban futures. State rescaling within the inter-urban hierarchy of the world cities system, also associated with the world city entrepreneurialism (Golubchikov, 2010; Brenner, 2009), transformed the nature of urban planning and policies into entrepreneurial tools of globally competing cities (Kipfer & Keil 2002). The imperative of urban growth became central to such an entrepreneurial mode of governance, and frequently the key justification of waterfront redevelopment.

Yet, the changing nature of urban politics and territorial governance during the post-socialist transition is here understood within subsequent state rescaling related to the institutional re-positioning towards the new territorial centres of power, and 'spaces of engagement' (Cox, 1998). This geopolitical shift, accompanied by the 'roll back' neoliberalism (Peck & Tickell, 2002), temporarily paralyzed the active role of the state in territorial planning and urban development. Academic debates on modes of urban governance and strategic visions of urban development under post-socialism underpinned the ad-hoc and fuzzy nature welling from their multiple transformations

(Feldman, 2000; Sykora & Bouzarovski, 2012). Three decades since the collapse of the communist regime is a sufficient time period for a qualitative analysis of the key political-economic logics behind waterfront re-development in the Slovak capital.

The current phase of waterfront re-development in Bratislava is driven by the property-led, entrepreneurial narrative emphasizing the role of the built environment in delivering prosperity (Heeg, 2011). The profit-seeking interests of the real estate industry reshape this frontier of capital fixities into a landscape of iconic large-scale projects (Sklair, 2006). It is exactly this interface, between the interests of the real estate industry and urban planning regulations, that is through the structure & agency nexus at the centre of the analysis. In particular, I analyze the relationship between the structural logics & mechanisms of capital accumulation and the decision-making processes of individual agencies from a multi-scalar perspective.

Within this context, the analysis unravels the decision-making processes shaping the future pathways of three selected localities on the waterfront: the urban port, the Chalupkova locality, the Karloveska cove. Attention is paid to the current stage of power relation, legitimacy, and transparency in urban planning, as well as to the multi-level institutional capacity to form and deliver a shared strategic vision for the waterfront. The highly unequal power-relations in the decision-making processes turned out to have a critical role in waiving the planning regulations in favour of the project-centric interests of particular real estate developers. Furthermore, the findings argue for the existence of a 'relational rift' between the strategic planning and land-use regulations, which contributes to the intensifying role of the ground rent in urban development. Instead of being innovative, the waterfront re-development in Bratislava rather imitates property-led ideas from elsewhere, which reinforces its speculative essence.

Keywords: waterfront transformations; urban growth; spatio-temporal fix; urban entrepreneurialism; state rescaling; postsocialism; property-led development; Bratislava