

BLAŽ KRIŽNIK

LOKALNI ODZIVI  
NA GLOBALNE IZZIVE:  
KULTURNI OKVIR PREOBRAZBE  
BARCELONE IN SEULA

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LOKALNI ODZIVI NA GLOBALNE IZZIVE: KULTURNI OKVIR PREOBRAZBE BARCELONE IN SEULA

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## SUMMARY

In our study *Local responses to global challenges: Cultural frame of urban change in Barcelona and Seoul*, we explored the relation between globalisation and social mobilization in cities, and linked everyday experience of cities at the local level with structural inequalities at the global level. We tried to answer questions about how cities respond to challenges and opportunities of globalisation, how those responses shape urban change in general and urban policy in particular, and how residents perceive changes in their everyday living environment, caused by the globalisation of cities. At the same time our study wanted to show how different grassroots responses to globalisation challenge function, form and meaning of a particular city. We have thus assumed that in parallel to globalisation, social mobilization in cities represents another important source of urban change. As a case study to verify our assumptions we have selected urban renewal of Poblenou in Barcelona and Wangsimni in Seoul, and local responses of the residents in Poblenou and Wangsimni to the transformation of both areas.

The life-world of individuals in cities is becoming increasingly affected by globalisation. The urban change at the local level cannot be fully explained without the understanding of structural changes at the global level. The latter are a consequence of a rapid global economic restructuring, informatization of society and recent political changes and have a growing impact on relations between and within the cities. Emerging network of world cities can be described as a form of economic, political and cultural domination of the core cities over the cities in a broader centre or excluded periphery of the network, where the domination of certain cities is often symbolic rather than geographical. Yet the relations in the network are not fixed and many cities are actually trying to improve their position by attracting foreign direct investments, important global events and new users. An improvement of global competitiveness and global image has thus become a mayor economic and political drive of urban change. Globalisation of cities directly influences their urban policy, which is often instrumental in improving the position of a city in the network. In this way the urban policy becomes more concerned with long-term interests of economic and political elite and less with a balanced and inclusive local development. The outcomes of competitive urban policy can be seen in the growing social and spatial divides, and new forms of political exclusion

in cities, where its economic and social costs are distributed in a noticeably uneven way, with economic and political elite taking the benefits, while marginalized social groups accept the burdens. The competition between cities at the global level thus results in undesired social, economic and political outcomes at the local level, frequently in a strong contrast with the actual interests and needs of residents.

We have shown in our study that the residents actively respond to changes in their everyday living environment caused by the globalisation of cities, whereby they are in favour of some changes, while at the same time rejecting the others. In this way the residents become involved in different forms of social mobilization in cities, which aims to address problems of inadequate collective consumption, cultural homogenisation or lacking participation in the political decision-making process. Social mobilization in cities often appears in neighbourhoods with a strong social cohesion and solidarity, high attachment of residents to a neighbourhood, tradition of social or political activism, and a distinct local culture. In a case of such neighbourhoods local community becomes an important source of urban movements formation, and one of social actors influencing urban change. When urban movements actively respond to undesired changes in their everyday living environment, they address conflicts at the local level, while at the same time they struggle for a more just social role of cities and a broader political change. Many urban movements have nonetheless a rather limited possibility to significantly influence the urban change. Not only because urban movements in general are focused on their everyday living environment, but also due to opportunity structures, which constrain their collective action. We have shown how different historic role of urban movements in the process of democratisation in Catalonia and South Korea shapes opportunity structures for urban movements in Barcelona and Seoul today.

Barcelona in Catalonia and Seoul in South Korea share a subordinated position to the dominant cities in the network of world cities. At the same time both cities always hold a dominant position in the national urban system as economic, political, cultural and symbolic centres of Catalonia and South Korea, and connected the two countries to the world. A similar structural position of Barcelona and Seoul at the global and national level has important implications for their urban policy. The transformation of Besòs River area in Barcelona and Cheonggyecheon Restoration or New Town Development projects in Seoul show how urban policy in both cities tries to improve the global competitiveness and global image and to strengthen the leading national role of Barcelona and Seoul. For those reasons urban renewal too is less concerned with restoring the quality of everyday life in each city. Instead it is increasingly becoming an instrument of competitive urban policy as 22@ Activity District in Barcelona and Wangsimni New Town in Seoul reveal. Both cases of urban renewal namely aim not only to improve the quality of everyday life in Poblenou and Wangsimni, but also to address the global competitiveness of high-tech industrial and service sector in Barcelona and to resolve the regional disparities in Seoul. While the urban renewal in Poblenou is based on an

integral long-term approach, which takes many of the existing social, economic and spatial conditions in the neighbourhood into consideration, the planned urban renewal in Wangsimni ignores the present-day neighbourhood and proposes to replace it with a new one. Yet although very different in their approach, both cases of urban renewal display a similar gap between the initial goals and the actual outcomes, where economic and political interests prevailed over the needs of residents. That kind of development had a decisive influence over the perception and understanding of urban renewal among the residents in both neighbourhoods, who became involved in different local groups and associations to be able to influence the course of urban renewal.

However, even though the majority of residents in Poblenou and Wangsimni rejected the proposed urban renewal, their actual responses were entirely different. With an exception of claims for just compensations and protection of jobs, most demands of residents in Poblenou were about participation in the political decision-making process and preservation of local culture and identity. We can therefore talk about cultural emancipation of residents in Poblenou, who eventually succeeded to preserve an important part of industrial heritage against demolition, and secured a new social housing, which apparently slowed down the gentrification of the neighbourhood. In this way the residents in Poblenou partly affected the implementation of 22@ Activity District. On the other hand, local responses in Wangsimni were limited entirely to the improvement of material conditions for few local landowners, who managed to exert their particular interests and notably changed the course of Wangsimni New Town in order to secure financial gains. At the end the prevalent material interests in Wangsimni influenced the destruction of present social and economic structure and identity of the neighbourhood. Because of the Wangsimni New Town the majority of residents in Wangsimni had to leave the area, while the existing neighbourhood was completely demolished.

We have found that the main reasons for differences between the local responses to urban renewal in Poblenou and Wangsimni are related to different structural position of the neighbourhoods and their residents in Barcelona and Seoul, existing opportunity structures in both cities, and distinctions in local culture. Present social and economic organization of both neighbourhoods is namely a result of a specific social, economic and urban development in the past, characterised by a strong social and economic marginalization of Poblenou and Wangsimni, compared to other parts of each city. As a result a strong attachment of residents to the neighbourhood had evolved, which influenced the perception of the everyday living environment and the view on the urban renewal among the residents. In contrast to Wangsimni, Poblenou also had fewer tenants, which made the attachment of residents even stronger. The other important difference between Wangsimni and Poblenou is related to different opportunity structures in both cities; in Barcelona there are many existing institutional ways to foster participation of residents in the political decision-making process, while in Seoul such opportunities are fairly limited at the moment.

Our findings also show that in parallel to the existing ownership and different opportunity structures, local culture was another important source of influence on the local responses to urban renewal in Poblenou and Wangsimni. Differences in local culture can be seen in residents' understanding of their history, in their perception of everyday living environment and symbolic meaning that they attach to particular places in the neighbourhood, as well as in their awareness of the neighbourhood as a distinct community with its own identity. Both neighbourhoods also have a rather different tradition of social and political activism, which influences the meaning that residents attach to collective action. We have established that the residents in Poblenou perceived the quality of their everyday living environment in a more positive way than in Wangsimni. They also saw particular places in Poblenou as an expression of their identity and therefore attached a strong symbolic meaning to them. At the same time Poblenou showed a long tradition of social and political activism, which in contrast to Wangsimni led to an active social mobilization and cultural emancipation. On the contrary, a negative perception of their everyday living environment and identity, and a lacking tradition of social mobilization in the past made the material interests prevail in local responses to the urban renewal and its anticipated outcomes in Wangsimni.

By observing the similarities and differences related to the structural position of Barcelona and Seoul at the global and national level, the goals and outcomes of their urban policy, as well as the urban renewal and social mobilization in Poblenou and Wangsimni, we tried to understand how local responses to global challenges influence urban change. The impact of globalisation on the urban policy in Barcelona and Seoul, as we have observed it in the case of urban renewal in Poblenou and Wangsimni, confirms our initial assumption that competitiveness of cities represents an important source of urban change. We have seen how the 22@ Activity District and Wangsimni New Town projects were instrumental in improving the global competitiveness and global image of Barcelona and Seoul. The local responses of residents in Poblenou and Wangsimni to the undesired changes in their everyday living environment, which resulted from the competitive urban policy in Barcelona and Seoul, and the outcomes of those responses also confirm our assumption about the role and meaning of social mobilization in cities. However, contrary to our initial assumption, the local responses to urban renewal in Poblenou and Wangsimni were considerably different in terms of the sources and the consequences for the future of each neighbourhood. We can conclude that the differences between both cases stem from a different structural position of the neighbourhoods and residents in each city, different opportunity structures in Barcelona and Seoul, and above all distinct local culture in Poblenou and Wangsimni. As we have seen the social mobilization in Poblenou resulted in cultural emancipation of the residents, while in Wangsimni the material interests of few residents prevailed. Local culture in Poblenou and Wangsimni seems to be the main reason why some residents in Wangsimni recognized the urban renewal as an opportunity, while the residents in Poblenou mainly rejected the urban renewal and perceived it as a negative challenge.

Our study *Local responses to global challenges: Cultural frame of urban change in Barcelona and Seoul* shows that although similar structural processes shape Barcelona and Seoul, the local culture remains an important and distinct source of urban change in both cities. Local culture namely significantly influences the local responses to global challenges in Poblenou and Wangsimni. If we are to understand the present role, expression and meaning as well as the future of a particular city, we need to know its history and local culture regardless to the overwhelming presence of global flows in cities today.