

**Neoliberal(ized) urban policies at work:  
the production of inequalities at local  
and at European scale through  
revitalization of historical spaces**

***Erika Nagy***

**Research Centre for Economic and Regional  
Studies, HAS  
Békéscsaba**

***Territorial Cohesion in Europe  
June 27-28, 2013 Pécs***

***Urban Aspects of Territorial Cohesion***

# The source of inspiration: confronting urban planning principles and praxis in urban development projects

- Revitalization in the era of „integrated planning and development“:
- INTERREG IIIB Hist.Urban (2006-2008)
- SEE ViTo (2009-2012)



**Focus on different contexts of urban planning discourses and practices**



## ... and the changing social contexts of revitalization in ECE

- **The 'deep neoliberalization' of principles and institutional practices within the EU in the post-Maastricht period – rescaling regional policies (Harvey, 2006; Brenner, 2009)**
- **Between transition and global crisis:**
  - → **socio-spatial polarization/at various scales**
  - → **recasting competences, resources and responsibilities btw. the local, national and supranational scales**
    - → **Dependence of localities (SMESTO/ECE) on EU funding**

# Research questions

- **How European urban policies are produced through discourses embedded into shared planning traditions and imbalanced power relations? How are such discourses reflected by institutional practices in revitalization projects?**
- **How do local practices rested on common urban policy reproduce inequalities at various scales? Do we still have post-socialist legacies shaping such processes?**

# Theoretical context

- Production of space – urban policy and planning as a tool of designing/producing abstract/conceived space (Lefebvre, 1991)
- Critical approaches towards the neoliberal state/ the neoliberalization of urban policies (Smith, 2002; Swyngedouw et al 2002 Brenner, 1999, 2009; Cochrane, 2007) – understanding urban policy as a discourse embedded in highly uneven/imbalanced power relations and as a set of institutional practices producing uneven urban landscapes (Bohman, 2004; Richardson-Jensen, 2000);
- The post-colonial approaches to post-socialisms/ understanding how daily institutional and individual practices reflect power relations *and* various cultural contexts (Stenning-Hörschelmann, 2008; Smith-Timár, 2010)

# The making of European urban policies

- **The myth of social participation vs. production of reality through discourses**



- **Definition of problems and frameworks (agents, targets) for interventions in Neoliberal terms (ESDP) – reproduction of „centrality and „peripherality“ in Europe (Huxley-Yiftachel, 2000; Richardson-Jesne, 2000; Cochrane, 2007)**
- **Urban policies at work: revitalization projects and gentrification**

# The making of European urban policies: definition of frameworks

- **ESDP: the first consistent document to guide socio-spatial interventions – surrounded by political debates**
- **Social goals are defined in the context of competitiveness: i.e. Pentagon/the rest; policentricity as a source for growth and for managing „local“ (=social) conflicts;**
- **Reflection and reproduction of spatial imbalances/division of work:**
  - **Interpreting ECE as periphery;**
  - **NOT considering various national and local contexts (institutional capacities, knowledge, financing);**
  - **Network-approach: a source of growth and marginalization**



# European urban policies at work: uneven development through revitalization?

- **Local documents and project goals/outputs reflect**
  - **the rhetoric of neoliberal urban policy (urban renaissance/urban space as an asset )**
  - **Power relations of discourses over urban development**
  - **national and local political contexts**
- **Definition of agents: focus stakeholders; poor and elderly as „weakness“;**
- **Agents in practice: limited social participation in practice/strict time frame and normativity of projects**
- **The reproduction of power relations within projects – and beyond: the ruling „project class“; West/East travelling of „best practices“; cultural differences and communication failures;**



- **Within the INTERREG III B project Hist.Urban they [project partners] jointly developed and implemented innovative and future-oriented approaches to build up lively, attractive and competitive urban centres. Despite different economic, social, geographic, cultural and institutional contexts, all partners share that they will apply integrated revitalisation strategies and instruments to combine urban development with the promotion of built-cultural heritage as development asset and factor for local and European identity.**

(Hist.Urban Manifesto, 2008)

# European urban policies at work - in post-socialist context?

- **Urban development documents are dominated by EU panels – they work as a basis for project-based development;**
- **Discourses over urban development are dominated by officials of the local state; limited social participation – hit by project time frame;**
- **Limited local autonomy counteract to territorial cooperation/stimulate competition and outward links;**
- **Diverse interpretations of goals and tools - but cultural diversity is not considered within the projects;**
- **A pressure on local project agents to suit project (EU program) standards and local political expectations → limits on open discourses and social involvement in shaping urban space.**