

GENTRIFICATION, A BACK TO THE CITY MOVEMENT BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTION

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The interest about gentrification in Spain is increasing although scientific production about the topic is still little. At the same time, most theories and case studies have been developed in English speaking countries and the cultural, economical and political gap between those geographies is big and obvious. Thus, in the USA or UK explanations about gentrification have been focused on the action of private agents. In this way, gentrification is referred as a back to the city movement by middle class consumers or by private capital depending on the researcher. Even though, more recently, some authors have related the last waves of gentrification to neoliberal hegemony and state policies. Anyway, in the Spanish frame, the role of the state is supposed to have been much more important in the early gentrification process. This paper discusses the differences between classical models of gentrification and the way gentrification has occurred in Spain, which seems to be related to the diverse role of the state. Two statements are proposed: local state politics as gentrification maker and the importance of public servants as gentrifiers.

First of all, between the eighties and the beginning of the current crisis, a first wave of gentrification processes begun in the main cities of the country by means of a strategic intervention of the state in historical city centres. Partially, it was the result of an ideological turn in urban politics, during the transition to democracy at the end of the seventies. So, a new urbanism, worried about the limitation of urban growth, city centre decline and urban heritage, seemed to be the main factor promoting gentrification. This is due to the growing weight of the state in western non English speaking countries. Secondly, in Spain, the production of gentrifiers in an early stage is less related to free market professionalization or post-industrial jobs than to a growth of the public sector and civil servants. Finally, the conception of gentrification as a back to the city movement from suburbs doesn't fit with the Spanish urban history. The main geographical reference in this case is historical city centres.

The paper contrast those propositions with a case study in San Luis-Alameda, the main traditionally working class area in Seville city centre. The role of the state and the main particularities of the case are discussed.

I. THE SPANISH FRAMEWORK. LAW AND URBAN POLITICS

The particularity of the Spanish case is produced by its recent history. Urban politics, the legal framework and economic model explain this difference. Thus, at the end of the eighties the political frame changes in Spain. At the same time, Western capitalism was suffering economical, political and cultural transformations. In this framework, urban and housing politics turn to a neoliberal approach deeply related to the recent evolution of the Spanish financially based economy.

The Spanish urban politics had an ideological turn after 1975. After three decades of functionalism and urban growth, city planning faced an urban decline in the city centre. The urban heritage begun to play an important role in urban politics and official documents discourses turned conservationist. In the following decade, a specific legal frame was developed for heritage conditioning the urban planning, especially in urban centres. In the eighties, general plans for big cities focused on historical urban centres, developing strategies for neighbourhood up-grading and urban heritage exploitation.

On the other hand, the important Spanish housing market and construction sector was developed mainly in the seventies, highly dependent on state subsidies. As liberalization occurs in the eighties, the new legal framework suppressed the rent control for tenants as well as indebtedness control on mortgages. In addition, the convergence process with Europe energized capital fluxes and investments from France and Germany. As a result, there were two speculative waves strongly based on real estate market from 1986 to 1992 and from 1997 to 2007, ending in the current crisis. Along that economic cycle, the main urban centres of Spain suffered the first wave of gentrification.

II. THE BACK TO THE CITY MOVEMENT BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTION IN SEVILLE

Like other similar sized cities in Spain, Seville suffered a strong decay of its city centre and lost a big amount of urban heritage in the second half of the twentieth century. In the sixties and seventies urban politics were focused on growth and an increment of housing stock. Functionalist planning in Seville avoided qualitative issues and neglected the conservation of historical areas. The intervention on the urban core was based on renewal politics, destroying substantial portions of the middle-age original neighbourhoods of Triana and San Julian. That city renewal also meant a first wave of displacement for low income neighbours.

Conservationist ideology in urban politics begun in the eighties, especially with the 1987 plan. First of all, it was an infrastructure planning designed to support the Universal Exposition of 1992, based in Seville, in an enclosure next to the historical centre. Secondly it was a restrained plan, limiting the residential expansion of the city. Finally, it faced the partial obsolescence of the city focusing on declining areas and, specially, on the urban core. It planned few urban reform interventions. The most important were the operations planned for San Luis, in the historical centre. The urban reform was linked and constrained formally for the heritage protection planning.

III. THE GENTRIFICATION OF SAN LUIS-ALAMEDA

San Luis-Alameda is the north-east section of the Seville's historical centre. At the end of the nineteenth century, it became the principal working class area of the city when little factories were settled and rural immigration established in collective rental houses. In the thirties the area had a high population density and it was a popular and vital enclave of the city. The urban decay began after the fifties when capital flows were relocated at the peripheral areas. Private investors and public intervention focused on urban growth and the city centre was nearly forgotten. Population flows followed capital flows to the periphery where the new working class neighbourhoods were established. The emigration of low income families was reinforced by a natural disaster, the 1961 flood, and the urban renewal politics. Vacancies in the city centre were covered by progressively impoverished families in a typical process of filtering down. As a result, problems with prostitution, crime and drug dealing increased around the eighties.

In the 1981 Spanish census, San Luis-Alameda still was the most densely populated neighbourhood in the urban centre. However, it had one of the oldest populations in the city, nearly a 19% were older than 65, and the most deteriorated housing stock with more than a 50 % of the buildings in bad conditions. Furthermore, its social status indicators were remarkably low: low education profile, high rate of manual workers and high rate of unemployment.

The local State intervention over the area was mainly planned in the eighties and developed in the nineties. It was carried out over both, the social and the physical environment. On one hand, the social intervention focused in the underclass. It was partly based in social care and workshops for the marginalized population, financed by European funds. Most of the commentators coincide in the little impact of that kind of politics by its lack of continuity. Instead of this, the main social intervention was the police action against underclass. Across the nineties, most of the prostitution clubs and pubs associated with lower social classes were closed down, a big proportion of the squatters in the area were evicted and either informal street markets were controlled or its vendors evicted. At the beginning of the century, the problems of crime and marginalization had been erased from the area as well as the lower social profile groups.

On the other hand, mostly simultaneously to the police action on the underclass, there was an intense urban reform operation, also partially financed with European Urban planning funds. New streets and a new square were drawn and built, many buildings were demolished and many other constructed. Indeed, it led to the substitution of part of the population and destroyed an important amount of urban heritage, even when discourses on official documents argued the opposite. Most of the European funds were used for the re-urbanization and reform of two prestige projects, a modernist mansion and a middle age one. State intervention soon created a contagious effect over private capital. Since the end of the nineties, private investments flowed to the area, buying and selling buildings, demolishing, reforming and redeveloping them.

Soon, as housing prices begun to rise, poor tenants became a problem for owners and developers. As a result, old rental buildings begun to be declared derelict by the local government, allowing eviction of low income tenants and redevelopment. Private owners also

developed different tactics of harassment to expel their tenants. Therefore, in the first decade of the twentieth first century, San Luis-Alameda had become a middle class neighbourhood. Most of the buildings had been renewed in the last fifteen years, and fashionable pubs and shops had spread all around the area.

In the 2001 census, 50% of the families had settled in the last decade. Most of them were coming from other areas in the same city. New settlers do not come from suburban areas and are normally young and small families. Socially, these were highly qualified people, mostly professionals and technicians associated to education, health and state management.

IV. CONCLUSION

The main Spanish urban centres have been gentrified in the last two decades, within a framework of an oversizing building sector and real estate speculation. Seville is an example of it, showing also how the conservationist ideology in urban politics has been manipulated by local governments in order to implement neoliberal politics. Those neoliberal politics have driven towards the displacement of low income tenants and social regressive processes.

Moreover, the case shows the possibility of a Spanish model for gentrification. The role of the state in a first wave of gentrification seems to be especially strong, related to the tough interventionist tradition and to the weakness of private entrepreneurs. It also shows a gentrifier that reflects a very important role of civil servants within the structure of the middle class in the capitalist periphery of Europe. Gentrifiers working in public administration and moving from a functionalist periphery, not the suburbs, which constitutes a remarkable difference with the gentrification process in English speaking countries.

In short, gentrification, for the case studied, rather than a return to the city from suburban areas, is a return to the historical centre from the city periphery by capital as well as by privileged strata of the population, both led by the turn on the city of the urban state policies.