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IDEOLOGY AND POWER IN A POST-SOCIALIST CITY

The city as a social and spatial whole is more of a process than a structure. Our concern here is not the division into the dynamic and the static in the city, but the basis of its existence and functioning, that is, the social production and reproduction of space. In terms of the spatial, social or cultural aspects, a characteristic of the city is its long-lasting quality, and it is clear that its current appearance and way of operating are the result of long-lasting, complex and multi-dimensional transformations. Hence, the main field of the analysis of the city should not be “the transformations of space”, but rather “the space of transformations”. As Henri Lefebvre said, “‘The object’ of attention must be changed from an object in space into the typical production of space.”¹ This implies that we perceive specific locations as places where the social negotiation of changes is practised and where the current forms and functions of the city are established. The city should be understood as a socially active space that provides

¹ H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Malden-Oxford-Victoria 2010, p. 37.

us with opportunities which are different from the ones defined by transformation understood in linear terms – that is, by means of categories that break away from the determinist concept of social and political change characteristic of historicism. At the same time, it is important to be aware of the fact that the social production of urban space is not an abstract process, but a material, bodily one, and that it is associated with the practices which take place within this space. In other words, the city changes not only through giving names or introducing symbols, but also and above all through a specific human activity in the social sphere. This is important because a reflexive relation is established here: the society produces its city, and the city consolidates its own existence by producing its users and citizens. Therefore, it is necessary to recognise the relationship between at least several elements which are crucial in the process of the space production/reproduction: ideology, practice and power.

Ideology constitutes a notion whose meaning is not only debatable, but also, by and large, undefined. Terry Eagleton lists at least 16 various

definitions of ideology² and, similarly to other researchers, draws attention to two fundamental trends of understanding this concept. The first one is ideology as “false consciousness”, derived mostly from the Marxist tradition – “false consciousness” as a certain illusion of the autonomous activity in which an individual or a social group live. The second cultural or anthropological trend defines ideology as a social representation of reality.³ Neither of these interpretations fully corresponds with the perspective which might be useful in the analysis of the social production of space in the city, and therefore this term will have to be defined further for the sake of our discussion.

The issue is complicated inasmuch as, for example, the post-socialist transformation currently tends to be represented as a departure from (bad) ideologies and subordination to

² See T. Eagleton, *Ideology. An Introduction*, London-New York 1991, pp. 1–2.

³ See J. Decker, *Ideology*, New York-London 2004, p. 7, and E. Chiapello, *Reconciling the Two Principal Meanings of the Notion of Ideology. The Example of the Concept of the “Spirit of Capitalism”*, “European Journal of Social Theory” 2003, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 159.

an appropriate “objective” authority like, for example, modernisation, a market economy or capitalism. The main hypothesis I would like to propose is as follows: the social production of urban space assumes a specific use of ideology. This means that the distinction between “the ideological socialist city” and “the post-ideological post-socialist city” is not justifiable. This question becomes part of a wider context in the discussion about the end of ideologies; although we cannot summarise this here, it is worth pointing out – referring to Slavoj Žižek – that ultimately the discussion about the “false” or “true” status of any ideology is by and large irrelevant, as ideology is not as much associated with the issue of representation as it is with the social relationships of domination. The more “non-ideological” a given situation seems, the more likely it is that some hidden ideologies are at play, while their impact is simply more effective.⁴ The more the post-socialist city is depicted as operating in the “natural” context of capitalism, globalisation or social changes, the greater the suspicion that this image is shaped by the ideologies operating within it. As Žižek emphasises, “any economic mechanisms or legal regulations [...] put into effect certain propositions and values which are profoundly ideological,” as indeed “the post-ideological society [...] is associated with a series of ideological assumptions that are vital to reproducing existing social relationships.”⁵ My hypothesis assumes that ideologies which operate in cities can be found in the spaces produced by the society.

This hypothesis needs to be explained in at least several aspects. First of all, the key aspect

⁴ See S. Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology*, London–New York 1994, pp. 1–32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

is the question of the “ideological space” itself. The ideology I have in mind is, to a great extent, characterised in reference to the theory formulated by Louis Althusser in his essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (2010).⁶ Althusser modified the previous definitions of ideology and combined them with the logic of the reproduction of the national capitalist system, while concentrating in particular on the immaterial (ideological) bases of the reproduction of the material production measures and manufacturing forces (here mainly workers). In accordance with this concept, ideology – as “lacking history” – is present in all social forms, and can be observed in material artefacts and social devices, and therefore also in the city. It becomes impossible to overestimate the possibility of the critical analysis of ideology in the city if we take into account Lefebvre’s statement in which he claims that the city is the most important “field” of social transformation.⁷

Simultaneously, space as a product of various interactions constitutes “the sphere in which the existence of variety, in the sense of co-existing plurality, is possible”;⁸ it is constantly constructed; it continuously finds itself in the process of creation. The definition of the ideological quality of space results from the combination of Althusser’s material theory of ideology and the relational interpretation of space proposed by Doreen B. Massey. Space is ideological because it is malleable and is subject – to a great indirect and direct degree – to the revealed and hidden activities of individu-

⁶ See L. Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*.

⁷ Cf. H. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, Minneapolis–London 2003, pp. 156–180.

⁸ D. Massey, *For Space*, London 2005, p. 9.

als and social groups that, in turn, always use the pronounced or implied ideology. Additionally, as Kanishka Goonewardena points out in her concept of *Urban Sensorium*, (urban) space “is a vital element and determinant of human sensual life”⁹ which can be perceived as an area of ideological mediation or the production of hegemony.

Another issue needing an explanation is the fact that the ideological social production of urban spaces is carried out through the practices of individuals and groups. The existence of certain representations and a group of values and attitudes associated with them or the dominant external and internalised discourses is not enough. To talk about the actual production of space, ideology has to be combined with practice, that is, with the everyday physical (bodily) actualisation and modification of the current situation. As Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello have rightly pointed out (in reference to “the spirit of capitalism”), a given form of social organisation requires authorisation by the society itself, that is, its engagement in the process of reproduction and authorisation.¹⁰ The city cannot be maintained only by an existing material substance or dominating discourses; it needs to be supported by its inhabitants through their activities and behaviours. The change of dominating principles and material changes in the city alone cannot determine whether or not the city transformation is complete – it has to be carried out through the ideologically justified

⁹ K. Goonewardena, *The Urban Sensorium: Space, Ideology and the Aestheticization of Politics*, “Antipode” 2005, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 47.

¹⁰ See L. Boltanski, E. Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London–New York 2005, pp. 12–16.

social practice. For example, the transformation of a factory into an office-commercial centre will have no significance unless there are people who decide to use it. Society creates space ideologically, and ideological space influences social practice: if the factory was still there instead of the office-commercial centre, in the space we would meet workers, and not consumers or customer service assistants.

Discussing the “intrinsic logic of cities”, Martina Löw proposes a thesis that in every city specific constellations of coherent resources of knowledge and forms of expression are developed:

Cities [...] are crystallised in the contexts of meaning which diversely affect people’s practices, that is, their identities, emotions, attitudes and thinking. Simultaneously and reflexively, these practices reproduce the intrinsic logic of the given city.¹¹

Löw does not mention ideologies existing in the city; nonetheless – while preserving all the differences – my proposed interpretation has some analogical features in relation to the concept proposed by the author of *The Intrinsic Logic of Cities*: instead of the intrinsic logic of the city I propose the analysis of dominant city ideologies which simultaneously co-create a unique quality of a given location; I also assume that the very use of the term “ideology” implies a specific potential of activity. It is crucial in the discussion on the transformation of the city because in the light of the adopted assumptions it is impossible to talk about one recognised transformation, but rather about a group of various local and speci-

¹¹ M. Löw, “The Intrinsic Logic of Cities. Towards a New Theory on Urbanism”, 2010, p. 6 (unpublished conference article).

fic transformations. Each location undergoing general system changes is unique; it has its own multidimensional “intrinsic logic”, or it also possesses – according to the proposed hypothesis – its own set of practised ideologies, its own specific social production of space. Of course, it is possible to define a common group of characteristics for different cities and establish a certain model or type – yet, without emphasising that different cities “co-react” with the changes in different ways because their intrinsic ideological determinants are different, our analysis will always bring limited results. Besides, it is of great political importance – the introduction of uniform solutions in the cities of a given country or region can bring different results: for example, the situation of historical capitals of post-socialist countries will be different from that of industrial cities whose foundation and development took place in the post-war period.

It is worth mentioning two examples showing social practice as a category within which the post-socialist transformation brought about important changes. This does not directly refer to the ideology in the city, but to a certain extent it is connected with the issue of space transformation. Allison Stenning and other researchers have used the category of domestication¹² in their research on post-socialist cities. They paid attention to the fact that the domestication of neoliberalism took place in two main spheres: among the social elite that perceived the new system as suitable for implementation in their country, but also in the everyday practice of individuals, households and communities. In the second case, which is more important from the

¹² See A. Stenning, A. Smith, A. Rochovská, D. Świątek, *Domesticating Neo-liberalism. Spaces of Economic Practice and Social Reproduction in Post-socialist Cities*, Malden–Oxford 2010.

point of view of our analysis, their objective was to show how the new economic and social system is assimilated and negotiated in everyday life and in what way these everyday practices change the system itself in the researched locations. Elizabeth Dunn, who analysed the transformations of management and work practices in the post-socialist industrial factory, points out that a very important aim of a new Western factory owner was to create a new type of worker or consumer. As Dunn demonstrated using the example of the factory’s management staff, this took place not only through the change of job titles (“senior officials” became “managers”) – that is, through changes in the current discourse – but mostly through activities which permeated the sphere of everyday social practice (fashion, ways of expressing, displayed behaviours) and which tended towards modifying an individual as such.¹³

These examples show how certain consolidated social (and also – consequently – material) structures, especially the physically understood urban and architectonic structure, behave during the transformation period. This space must also be perceived as active, as it retains its social influence. In this sense, each city is determined by two factors: on the one hand, relatively constant space relationships shaped by history, and on the other, changeable systems of ideology – partially shared and partially specific to a given location. In other words: the urban system and architecture inherited from the previous period – for example, the existence of a given type of housing estate, the system of zones, the transport system

¹³ See E. Dunn, *Prywatyzując Polskę. O bobofrutach, biznesie i restrukturyzacji pracy* [Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labour], Warszawa 2008, pp. 89–95.

– would be as important a factor as the political, economic and social system changes. The reason for this is that, despite the change in the social context, the materially existing city (created in a process of social space production) retains its functions and ways of influence to a considerable degree. Global changes are essentially very fast, whereas ideologies that guarantee and maintain them are capable not only of transforming the systems of power, economy etc. quickly, but also of transforming people as individuals and groups. The structure of the cities, however, despite the equally conspicuous fast changes, is much more permanent and still has an impact on social practices which use and reproduce this structure. The social city production takes place in the current space which – although transformed as well – actively participates in the production.

The question of power in the city is closely associated with the question of ideology. Ideological constellations, created and reproduced in the city, are not by and large neutral and “natural”. Although ideologies are practised in specific social spaces, they do not only come down to mental constructs or units of representation, as they can still create nodal points and be translated into hegemonic structures. In this instance, the hegemonic quality should not be understood as a cultural hegemony based on the relationship between the basis and the extension as proposed by Antonio Gramsci, but rather in a relational way – as suggested by Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.¹⁴ The city is shaped by many ideologies (both – in terms of space – internal and external), but in specific social-

¹⁴ See E. Laclau, C. Mouffe, *Hegemonia i socjalistyczna strategia. Przyczynek do projektu radykalnej polityki demokratycznej* [Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics], Wrocław 2007.

spatial conditions, the relationships between these ideologies have to be established in such a way that they become efficient in the space practice. Such a relationship can be constituted by, for example, the combination of national ideology with the ideology of a certain model of capitalism which supports the local (national) social city system removed from any external influences – while assuming that this kind of space will be socially practised and reproduced. From this perspective, the city cannot be determined in an essentialistic way, but it becomes a collection of some specific relationships, within which more general ideologies (for example, of the free market, private property) acquire dominant significance, both in the discourse and in practice, in particular. Also the space is dominated (and dominant) as it is transformed and mediated through practice.¹⁵

In this space it is not only power relationships that are at play, but also violence; every permanent materialisation of ideology within the space (mainly but not only in the construction industry) means that its influence on the city is stabilised. Obviously, to a certain degree this influence can be modified by practice, but in spite of this – as a permanent structure – it retains its power. Here we can refer to Michel Foucault,¹⁶ who paid particular attention to the questions of devices or spaces determined by authorities. The space is no longer perceived as neutral, but it is included in the order of power as a place in which a game of domination and

¹⁵ See H. Lefebvre, op. cit., p. 164.

¹⁶ See M. Foucault, *Trzeba bronić społeczeństwa. Wykłady w Collège de France 1976* [In Defence of Society. Lectures at the Collège de France 1976], Warszawa 1998, p. 42; D. Hawkes, *Ideology*, London–New York 1996, pp. 160–168.

submission is enacted.¹⁷ From this perspective, any decisions on organisation of space (especially those founded on “knowledge” or “expertise”) comprise elements of power and violence, which influences social practice. In other words, such or another way of shaping the city space implies support, that is, the operationalisation of ideology which gains practical social support in a given time and place. For example, in a post-socialist city it is not surprising to see the development of supermarkets or shopping centres, which can be perceived here as non-neutral devices of power realised through supporting and focusing on specific social practices. The public space of cities, considered highly important from the declarative (discursive) point of view, does not become a social or socialised space – that is, the space that allows indefiniteness, an encounter or a conflict – but it is colonised through commercial activity. The neoliberal ideology in the city is not directed towards the engagement of citizens, but more towards the creation of new capitalist people – employees and consumers. Therefore, it is not surprising that within this ideological and spatial system the practice of civic life is hindered. Power and violence in the cities are located in the space and in the practised ideology – all the more so because this distinction is critical and analytical in nature, as in reality these two elements are closely interconnected. In this sense, both ideology and ideologically produced social space are political questions.

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY AGATA MASŁOWSKA

¹⁷ See M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, New York 1980 and R. West-Pavlov, *Space in Theory. Kristeva, Deleuze, Foucault*, Amsterdam–New York 2009, pp. 143–169.