

CENTER AND PERIPHERY: BORDERLINE CITIES AND BORDERLINES OF CITIES

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The link between the “centre” and “periphery” is obviously multidimensional and multifaceted, involving geographic, geopolitical, economic and socio-cultural connotations. The “centre” is usually perceived as a desirable place of residence that demonstrates achieved success and attribution to the elite of the society. In addition, it usually generates ideas and innovations, cumulates and disseminates political and economic power and influence, and is perceived as a place where a symbolic capital could be easily accumulated. Meanwhile, such radiance of the “centre” hardly reaches “peripheries” or “borderlines”. For this reason they are usually described using such terms as “provinciality”, “otherness”, “exotic” or even “savagery”. However, it is interesting that both the “centre” and “borderlines” are often characterized by demographic and cultural hybridity, fluidity and volatility. Yuri Lotman, Russian semiotician who originated from St. Petersburg but lived and worked in the Estonian town of Tartu (and, thus, a “periphery” man himself), caught this dynamics perfectly well by writing about a permanent, mutual enriching circulation of ideas, people and cultural phenomena between the “centre” and “periphery”. Nevertheless, “borderlineness” still remains a mysterious phenomenon that has not yet been fully investigated.

In urbanism and architecture, the phenomenon of “borderlineness” is just as multi-faceted. It can be viewed from at least two perspectives: as borderline cities or peripheries within cities. In the first case, we should be looking for places of intersection and tectonic fractures of civilizations (e.g. Istanbul, which stands on two continents, or civilizational collision of the Estonian city of Narva and Russian Ivangorod). Looking through the prism of modern state power distribution, the purpose of the state becomes apparent: to colonize, overtake or claim the entire territory to its very fixed borders. Thus, the intention is not only

focused on cultural and physical protection from undesirable influence of strangers, but also – on creation of a nationally unified socioeconomic infrastructure and achieve a certain standard of living for all residents of that country. It is obvious that in the case of war or a cross-border conflict, borderline cities become the prime targets; therefore, the identity and loyalty of these residents has always been an especially important issue. For this reason, the struggle for the identity of borderline towns has been regarded as relevant by multinational empires as well as national states. Many historical examples suggest that in this respect, strategies chosen for borderline cities ranged from preservation and promotion of ethnic diversity in the first case and assimilation, suppression or even ethnic cleansing in the second case. In empires of Central and Eastern Europe, it was enough to create rather laconic and standardized symbols of architectural language and incorporate them into the urban landscape of “borderlines”, taking into account specifics of architectural traditions and heritage of local nations (which is demonstrated, for example, by case studies on formation and reconstruction of capital cities of the Soviet Republics in the manner of socialist realism during the Stalin period); meanwhile in the 19th–20th centuries, national states not only tried to homogenise the ethnic composition of the population, but also attempted to transform urban public spaces to send a clear and easily understood message that demonstrates and strengthens its national hegemony. The results of these efforts in borderline cities of Central and Eastern Europe such as Königsberg/Kaliningrad, Breslau/Wrocław, Vilnius/Wilno/Vilnia, Grodno, Lviv/Lvov, Kharkiv/Kharkov, Trieste left a rather evident trace. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lithuania as well as some other post-Soviet countries immediately removed signs and symbols of the former political regime, replacing them with new

national ones. Therefore, the politics of urban heritage are currently faced with phenomena that are sometimes hard to solve due to deficiency in social consensus. Physical remains of former alien regimes in cities are not only marginalized but are also perceived as dissonant, irritating and uncomfortable inheritance, which is the reason why stakeholders fail to find any sustainable compromise in relation to its current use.

However, we may look at the phenomenon of borderlineness from a different perspective, searching for its manifestations in a city as such. Here, it is possible to distinguish a few levels: *geographical* (physical difference of urban and surrounding agrarian landscape), *sensu stricto urban* (blank spaces between different parts of the city – the so-called urban areas of wilderness), *architectural* (the historic nucleus or historic quarters versus the new districts), *political* (usually, institutions of political power and representational public spaces concentrated in the very heart of the city versus marginal residential or industrial areas), *economic and social* (gentrification versus ghettoization), and finally, *cultural* (borderlines of living spaces of different ethnic, social or religious groups). Problems of spatial and socioeconomic se-

paration and exclusion, known as gentrification and ghettoization, as well as uncontrolled development of suburbs lacking any social infrastructure, are often the signs of misbalanced urban development, which poses serious challenges for democratic processes and civil harmony.

Thus, borderlineness has many forms. It may appear as open or hidden, or “partisan” debates concerning the control of public urban spaces. The degree of control over social environment can be measured by the extent of visual pollution in a city, including large amounts of commercials as well as graffiti and other forms of street art, and the level of lawfulness and tolerance in relation to such phenomena. Some cities regard such phenomena as vandalism and make great efforts to banish them at least from the city centre and quarters visited by tourists. Meanwhile, other cities leave some room for official aesthetics of public spaces, usually established using public monuments and official rituals, but also for the forms of alternative cultural expression. Clearly, this issue of the journal could only touch upon some of the topics related to borderlineness. Nevertheless, we hope it will serve as a catalyst for further discussions.