

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

CHANGES IN THE DISCOURSE ON SPACE DURING THE GENTRIFICATION PROCESS. CASE STUDY OF EL CABANYAL NEIGHBOURHOOD (VALENCIA)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Neoliberalism works through a continuous transformation of products into other products with higher added value. Thus, because of the reduction of land transformation in Spain after 2008 economic crisis, gentrification becomes neoliberalism's most used way of doing urban planning, thanks to the rent gap produced by the first disinvestment and physical deterioration, followed by a reinvestment in fix capital, that allows the capitalist to have an investment worthwhile enough to be able to carry it out.

In all this process, capital needs media to attract new consumers to this space thanks to articles publicizing the new opportunities and experiences that come with living and visiting this space. In some cases, capital will also need some spaces that have bad media publicity to discover spaces where there is a rent gap that favours its future investments.

Following this trend of urban planning, Valencian local governments have developed, since the 1990s, urban upgrading policies in different city spaces to attract investments and higher income population. One of these urban upgrades was in El Cabanyal neighbourhood, and old working-class neighbourhood that is located close to the city waterfront, the Turia Garden and the Arts and Sciences City, a location that rose a big interest among investors, willing to invest in the capital gains that would create the neighbourhood redevelopment.

The project, proposed at the end of the 20th century, dealt with a big social response against it. To end with this social response, the Administration started a process of physical and social deterioration, creating what press show as *fear space* or a *problem-neighbourhood*. In 2015 the project was abandoned, and the new city government started recover policy that, due to the rent gap created during the previous years, attract private capital wishing to attract new higher-income visitors and residents to this renewed space that has become one of the most desired spaces for the local and foreign population to live and visit; a vision frequently found in the press and tourist guides of the city.

2. OBJECTIVES

If it is understood that capital needs advertising to attract consumers to the product in which it has invested, and that gentrification and touristification are only the result of the exacerbated consumption of a part of the city in which capital has made an investment to attract a consumer, resident or tourist, with higher income than the pre-existing one; this article attempts to identify the importance of the way in which a space is presented to public opinion, through the press, in the construction of the narrative that serves gentrification, thanks to the case study of the El Cabanyal neighbourhood in Valencia. Therefore, this work starts from two questions: the first, to know if press changes its narrative in a way that can favour an attraction of city consumers to this space; and the second, to know if this change in the discourse coincides, temporally, with the different phases that are identified in the gentrification process.

3. METHODS

Although it is important to have a clear definition of the concepts to be used in an effort to understand the role of the press in a process of gentrification or touristification, this article is not a bibliographic review of processes of gentrification or touristification, nor is it about communication theory and the relationships between economic power, political power and media. It is a case study of changes in the discourse of the press in a gentrified neighbourhood, or one undergoing gentrification.

Therefore, once the bibliography has defined the phases of the gentrification process and how the press narrative can respond to the interests of capital, to advance in the case study, a search has been made through fifty-seven media, including newspapers, television channels and travel guides, both national and international, for articles describing El Cabanyal neighbourhood published between 2010 and 2023.

In this search, one hundred and fifteen articles have been collected from nineteen different media, especially Spanish and British ones, which have been read in a reflective manner, in which the aim was not to count the words used in these texts, but to understand the author's discourse. At the same time as these texts were read, a matrix has been prepared *ex professo*, which includes the characteristics of the publication, the vision given of the neighbourhood, and what stands out about it.

4. RESULTS

In the disinvestment phase that generally begin gentrification process, which in the period analysed would go from 2010 to 2014, because these were the years in which the resistance of a large part of the local population to the project to extend Blasco Ibáñez Avenue forced the City Council to carry out actions that would encourage the degradation of the urban and social network of the neighbourhood; the information obtained about the neighbourhood comes mainly from the national press, which presents the neighbourhood as a dangerous space due to a social conflict, that the Administration wants to end through its urban improvement plan, based on the construction of a new space on the remains of

the existing one. This situation creates a discourse of what is defined as a *space of fear* or a *problem-neighbourhood*, which drives away investment, except risk investment, from this space because it is only attractive to the people who live there.

The change in the local government and the predominant urban planning model that took place in Valencia since 2015, meant the halting of the project to extend Blasco Ibáñez Avenue and the beginning of the social and territorial recovery of the neighbourhood through the rehabilitation or recovery of its built space. Thus, between 2014 and 2018, the vision offered of El Cabanyal began to change because, even though the description of the neighbourhood as a degraded space was still notable, they focused on indicating that the degradation was due to a slow Administration action to solve the problems generated in the previous stage, and not to a worsening of the situation. This means that it is considered a phase of uncertainty because the neighbourhood does not visibly improve, but funds have already been committed, and the regeneration projects are close to be approved. Because of this, news about the recovery of the neighbourhood stands out, including some news that are already beginning to talk about an incipient process of gentrification due to the arrival of the first investors in El Cabanyal.

Due to the trend of diversification of the offer that the new consumer demands aroused after the end of the COVID-19 Pandemic, between 2019 and 2020 a big number of alternatives to the main tourist cities and main cities for temporary residents were presented. Reflecting the big inversion that was held in El Cabanyal, the neighbourhood was considered one of these new alternatives and started to appear in a big number of international presses, especially British media, which, in 2020, wrote more articles about El Cabanyal than Spanish press.

Since 2020, the neighbourhood struggle and drugs have already been forgotten, and El Cabanyal no longer appears in the current affairs sections; because now it appears, mostly, in the travel and lifestyle sections because it is a new space for visit or live in thanks to the authentic character that gives it being an old fishing neighbourhood, where many of the traditions of when it was a village have been preserved.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Since land transformation has been reduced to almost insignificant after the 2008 crisis, the commercialization of space, which requires a rent gap, can only be achieved by lowering the cost of already developed land and transforming it into other land of greater value that guarantees profits for the investor. In this whole process, the press acts as an amplifier of the actions carried out, favouring the outflow of capital during the disinvestment processes by presenting the territory as a space of fear or a problem neighbourhood; or the attraction, during the investment phases, of the most affluent classes who will want to access the new product offered by economic power and which everyone is talking about.

Although the publication of articles in newspapers and magazines about the neighbourhood did not directly intervene in its transformation, they may have been decisive in generating a favourable environment to capital carrying out the gentrification process, since, at first, the media, almost exclusively Spanish, disseminated a negative image of the neighbourhood, which favoured the continuation of the process of degradation by

driving investment away from El Cabanyal. Then, they conveyed a more neutral and hopeful discourse after the abandonment of the first regeneration project and the start of urban and social recovery programmes, which may have attracted the first investors who saw in the neighbourhood a potential space to generate capital accumulation due to the low cost of property.

The process would be still underway, but the acceleration of gentrification processes worldwide promoted after COVID-19 in order to quickly recover the tourism, real estate and investment sectors suddenly generated a large production of texts citing El Cabanyal as a space where it was necessary to go for tourism, if not to stay and live, especially at an international-European level, a very important niche of consumers for gentrification processes in the Mediterranean basin because, due to the difference in income, they are able to preferentially access housing market.