

A city's endeavour of becoming global – Foreign investment, urban development and segregation in Timișoara (Romania)

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Abstract: The development of cities has been closely connected to global processes and the spread of capitalism. Today, even cities of smaller scales experience the impact of global and capitalist influences and embody the processes and consequences in their landscape's economic, spatial, and social dimensions. This paper aims to investigate a city's endeavour to become global, what that entails, and what the consequences of such an undertaking are. It analyses how, in the Romanian town of Timisoara, capitalist transformation and city planning policies aimed at making a "global city" result in segregation.

Introduction – A city's endeavour to become 'global'

"I don't think everybody is equal in Timișoara. If you have money, you can of course decide where you live, which neighbourhood you like, and where your kids should go to school. I am not saying it is as bad as in other cities around the world. No, no, for sure not. But if you ask me if everybody has the same right, I don't think so, no."

– Andreea²

"The right to the city is not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart's desire [...] But the right to remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality is one of the most precious of all human rights. The sheer pace and chaotic forms of urbanization throughout the world have made it hard to reflect on the nature of this task. We have been made and re-made without knowing exactly why, how, wherefore, and to what end. How then, can we better exercise this right to the city?"

– David Harvey, 2008

Cities have historically been places of exchange, meeting hubs, and cross-points for news, commerce, and religions. This importance is still evident in the 21st century, particularly in the last decade, which has been marked by a remarkable increase in the number of cities and an acceleration of their development. A major driver of this development has been the spread of capitalism which, along with other global processes, has strongly influenced the nature of city development and the associated positive and negative consequences of this growth. Today, even cities of smaller scales experience the impact of global and capitalist influences and embody the processes and consequences in their landscape's economic, spatial, and social dimensions. This is

an important issue given that more than fifty percent of the world's population lives in a city environment, with many cities passing the ten million population threshold. As such, much academic attention has been given to megacities, global cities, metropolises, and world cities and the issues connected to this form of spatial organisation such as overcrowding, homelessness, ghettoisation, and housing unaffordability. In the study of neoliberal spaces, Marxist perspectives have argued that the ability to participate in the creation of urban socialities is a precious human right. This consideration is also reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals³, underlined by The World Bank (2022)⁴ and put forward by a number of global movements, networks, and (policy) publications⁵

However, this has not translated to the reality of living in a city where this human right is unequally realised. I was confronted with this fact in my recent visit to the West-Romanian city of Timișoara. This city, now the second-largest city in the country, had changed compared to the image that I remembered from my childhood holidays. The most noticeable change was in the built environment, but I felt that there were deeper entanglements that could only be understood through academic study. As such, this paper aims to investigate a city's endeavour to become global, what that entails, and what the consequences of such an undertaking are. I will analyse how, in the Romanian town of Timișoara, capitalist transformation and city planning policies aimed at making a "global city" result in segregation. Timișoara is a relevant subject of study as it is the 2023 European Capital of Culture and the motto is "Shine your light. Light up your city". In an attempt to "Europeanise" and "globalise" the city, the local administration is reframing the identity of Timișoara. This new identity is constructed through the use of signifiers like 'vibrant', 'dynamic', 'modern', 'well-connected', 'European', 'metropolitan', and 'global'. As such, this occasion presents an opportunity to address not only the bright aspects of the city – as the official narrative does – but also to consider the processes that remain shadowed as this narrative is constructed and disseminated.

Against this backdrop, I will examine the urban development of the city of Timișoara by analysing how the influx of multinational companies and their capital shape the landscape, structure, and images of the city. My specific focus is on the everyday consequences that urban planning policies and projects have on the social structure of Timișoara. Here, I argue that segregation is the direct result of neoliberal redevelopment.

This paper takes its theoretical basis from David Harvey's study of the uneven geographical development within neoliberal spaces along with Vincze and Zamfir's analytical framework of the racialisation of housing. This theoretical framework is supplemented by empirical data collected through expert interviews and field observations conducted during my visits to Timișoara. Two case studies are located in the same district in Timișoara: the ISHO real estate project and the historical area around Piața Traian (Traian Square). This approach promotes a bottom-up method derived from anthropological methodology and foregrounds the daily consequences experienced by city inhabitants due to global and capitalist processes. I believe that this analytical focus can offer deeper insights into these effects. Moreover, this argument disrupts the traditional positioning of cities in academic debates as spatial fields in which global processes take place. This essay attempts to contribute to the approach of bringing back the experience of a wider range of cities into the debate.

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Certainly, as Andreea underlined in her statement, there are worse cities. In urbanisation debates in the European context, the discourse usually centres on gentrification in Berlin, segregation in Paris, and rising rents in London. Timișoara is an important case study as it is a city in transition. Hence, we can actually observe and counteract the unfolding process of segregation. Thus, the objective of this essay is also to raise the awareness of the local administration and present counteractive measures that can be taken in Timișoara.

Theoretical framework: Urban development under the capitalist veil

“How we view the world and define possibilities depends on which side of the tracks we are on and to what kinds of consumerism we have access to. In the past decades, the neoliberal turn has restored class power to rich elites. [...] The results are indelibly etched into the spatial forms of our cities, which increasingly become cities of fortified fragments, of gated communities and privatized public spaces kept under constant surveillance.” (Harvey 2008, 9)

As David Harvey (2009) asserts: “the ‘urban’ has a specific meaning under the capitalist mode of production” (Harvey 2009, 116). Capitalism is closely connected to neoliberal structures on a global level which manifest on the local level in spaces like the city. The demarcation of this analytical space has been labeled “the global city” (Sassen 1991). This concept has been widely discussed and criticised (Abu-Lughod 1995; Andrusz 1996; Askew 2002; Robinson 2002). Such debates will be reflected in the following section through a methodological bottom-up approach and the idea of re-scaling.

The academic discourse on global cities has focused on “the dynamics and processes that get territorialized are global” (Sassen 2005, 27). This conceptual focus has been criticised as highly exclusive as it includes only the experience of a few Western mega-cities. Existing studies focus on the similarities of world cities and not on the differentiated effects that processes originating at the international level have in specific localities (Abu-Lughod 1995, 171). This has led critics to emphasise the importance of processes, rather than categories, in thinking about how ‘global’ economic developments affect all cities (Robinson 2002). This approach prioritises ‘globalising cities’ as opposed to ‘globalised cities’, thereby expanding the academic focus beyond traditional Global North reference points to encompass cities in the Global South on a broader scale, allowing for factors like population size and amount of investment to be considered.

Thus, the process and method of re-scaling are crucial elements of this paper. To this end, this essay utilises an anthropological inductive method to critically examine the effects of segregation in urban structures under capitalist development. This approach will mitigate the traditional

limitations of the top-down approach which often excludes the lived experience of city inhabitants.

Urbanisation is closely associated with the images of modern working and living spaces, skyscrapers, office buildings, real estate complexes, and residences. However, the infrastructural landscape of a city is only the first visual development that can be observed. These spatial arrangements hint at deeper laying changes, including flows of ideas (cf. ideoscapes, Appadurai 1996) and social stratification. As this paper will demonstrate, these developments are often catalysed by the relocation of transnational companies into these cities.

The capitalist mode of production, accumulation, and class struggle are therefore important considerations in relation to the urban process (Harvey 2009, 116). In this relationship, urban development provides the means for the capitalist system to function. In capitalist economies, the surplus product made needs to be absorbed, invested so to conserve it and protect it from devaluation. Furthermore, Harvey argues that cities, through the process of urbanisation, have offered a terrain for the expansion of profitable capitalist activity, albeit on a highly uneven and unequally distributed basis. Urban transformations, driven by the increase of foreign investment, have allowed transnational companies to become constitutional actors in the labour market, policy interests, and the building and housing market of the city.

The built environment of a city not only follows the concept of transformation, but also stands for an iconic architecture of “distinctive symbolic and aesthetic significance” (Sklair and Gherardi 2015, 51) as an expression of the rising capitalist middle class. New real estate projects are marketed towards this socioeconomic group as they afford the high rents and prices. When imagining segregation what comes to mind is a quite physical image: Gated communities, ghettos, centre and periphery are only a few key words. In post-communist countries urban segregation is very much interlinked with the capitalist development and structure of cities, meaning the influx of capital and its uneven distribution in the form of salaries among different social groups. As Romania is a former communist state, the further analysis of Timișoara will focus on class as a category in segregation.

Housing takes a central role in the production of racialised and spatialised divisions in capitalist cities (Vincze and Zamfir 2019, 439). While research on segregation often focuses on deprived areas, a concentration of the affluent in certain areas must also be taken into consideration. For example, in some cities the rich have established gated communities or apartment towers within the centre of the city. While the rents rise in central areas of cities and the new estates, not everybody profits from the foreign investment and can pay the high rents. Those have to move to other areas of the city. A development that is supported by policy and newsmakers who promote the “modern lifestyle” and do not stop raising rents and which results in the spatial segregation and housing inequalities in the city.

Segregation goes beyond the physical, beyond the built environment, beyond housing. Segregation means not only that different groups live in different areas of the city. But the place where people live directly influences the goods they can access: be it food, health, education or consumerism, and predestines the formation of classes and elites. It decides, “on which side of the tracks we are on”. Questions regarding the right to (affordable) housing, equality and equality of opportunities, cumulate in the call for the right to the city (Lefebvre 1968/2009), an urban revolution. Neoliberal development has directly fueled urban development. Urbanisation and the new lifestyle and services that go along with it changed in ways that could absorb vast surpluses of money (Harvey 2008). Or as Harvey (2008, 8) puts it as well: “Quality of urban life has become

a commodity for those with money". Those, who do not own that kind of money and do not have access to the places from which the capital origins are excluded from the new living places and areas of new urban life.

In their book *Cities after Socialism* Andrusz, Harloe and Szelenyi (1996, 2) argue convincingly: "the cities of capitalism and socialism both shape and are shaped by their respective forms of economic organization, class formation and political structures. The socio-spatial organization of cities, their politics and administration, their housing and property markets, their patterns of social interaction are directly linked to the major features of the socialist and capitalist orders". Therefore, in studying cities in that geographical area we must not "reject and/or ignore the significance of persisting legacies from the socialist period" (Andrusz, Harloe and Szelenyi 1996, 2). As Garcia-Ayllon (2018, 29) states "the fall of the communist regimes in the Eastern European countries supposed a drastic transformation in their economic systems that has been reflected in the urban development of their cities". While similar risks lie in the adoption of capitalist economies and their urban systems negatively impact and shape urban structures and an analysis of cities in that context must account for both.

Also for Romania, several authors have added new perspectives to the critical analysis of urban transformations. In Romania, the post-'89 period of transition towards new capitalist policies altered the inherited urban patterns and broke up the existing urban structures (Pavel and Jucu 2020, 6). A transition from communist urban planning to the new market-oriented urban management style took place. Urban restructuring was accompanied by a process of privatisation (Aguirre, Eick, and Reese 2006) in social and economic areas ranging from the local urban economy to the housing capital of the city, resulting in serious spatial inequalities and locally uneven development (Smith 2010; Soaita 2014). Many authors have argued that a racist distribution of property lies at the heart of the post-socialist property regime (Vilenica 2019; Teodorescu 2019); one that has and continues to disadvantage Roma in society and on the housing market. After 1990 the social and public housing stock in Romania went through a rapid and thorough process of privatisation (Popovici 2020, 100). As was the case in most Eastern European countries, legislation was introduced that enabled a vast majority of the population to buy nationalised property – namely the apartments they were occupying. In this context, many Roma who belonged to lower-income parts of the population were not able to purchase the places they were living in but had to continue to rent a place. The accusation has been made by different organisations that the process of privatisation together with restitutions (Lancione 2018) and the lack of further development of public and social housing marked the state as an accomplice to the ambitions of transnational neoliberal finance and real estate sectors (FCDL 2014). The housing market in Romania is thus one that includes race as a category. Against this backdrop, the case study of the city of Timișoara will be the field in which the theory will be applied. The urban development of the city will be analysed at the intersection of these aspects of capitalist development, the history of socialist city structures and racism in the housing market, and neoliberal policies.

Timișoara – Romania's door to Europe

Timișoara is located in the Banat region in the South-West of Romania. It is the third-largest city in the country and the economic, cultural, and social centre of West Romania. After fifty years of communism in December 1989, Timișoara witnessed as the first city in Romania a series of mass street protests, which then became the Romanian Revolution. Three days later, on 20 December, Timișoara was declared the first city free of communism in Romania. Up until today, it

is made up of its multi-ethnic population. Moreover, in the last ten to fifteen years, it has become known internationally as an attractive destination for business, labour, and living. Through its infrastructure of fast Internet and telephony, low minimum wages, and since 2007 location within the European Union, Romania and Timișoara in the West, close to Hungary and Serbia, have become a popular destination for the outsourcing of international companies which are major employment providers. Building upon the critique by Robinson, Abu-Lughod, and others along with the suggestions for a more inclusive conception of the global city, I will take a closer look at Timișoara and its development.

In the aftermath of the revolution, Romania has undergone a fundamental transformation of its political, economic, social, cultural, and legal systems in its transition from communism to capitalism. After a short depression in the 1990s, the economy started to grow steadily, registering on average 4.9% of annual GDP growth in the 2000s, followed by an even faster growth rate of 5.3% per year during the 2010s (NIS 2023). One of the biggest structural changes has been the privatisation of the formerly state-owned industry. With the transition to market economy and neoliberal policies, the private sector started to boom. The country adopted the strategy of attracting foreign direct investment. Romania was able to access another market in 2007 with its accession to the European Union. The Guardian wrote in 2017 that “Romania shrugs off label of Europe’s poor man as economy booms”⁶. Big transnational corporations such as Siemens, Bosch, Ford, Microsoft and Amazon have set up operations in Romania. The services and tech sectors (IT outsourcing), manufacturing, and exports are the most important business areas which attract companies due to low wages, fibre broadband, language proficiency, and tech affinity. Not only the country as a whole, but also particular cities were very successful in attracting investors. Timișoara is, besides the capital Bucharest and the third-biggest city Cluj, one of the most successful ones.

In socialist times, the region around Timișoara was characterised by food processing, textile, and leather industries. However, the economic structure of the city changed in the 1990s with newly settled growth sectors such as the electronics and construction machinery industry, automotive suppliers, and the IT industry. Timișoara is one of the country’s development centres, and its economy is booming since 2004. Foreign investment, especially in high-tech sectors, has risen. Already in 2005 the city has been called Romania’s economic showcase. The increased number of foreign investment was called a “second revolution”. In 2016, Timișoara was awarded as the most dynamic city and the best city for business in Romania by Forbes, before the capital Bucharest and the city of Cluj⁷. In 2020 the city had a GDP of almost 10 billion euros and international investments at 1.7 billion euros shared among 17,000 companies according to Forbes Romania⁸. In Timișoara, the main economic area besides the production of car parts and IT industry, encompasses the services sector with finance, HR, PR and call centres. Incidentally, one of the most important companies in Timiș County, and also the largest employer in 2019, is Profi. The retailer recorded a turnover of more than 7.2 billion lei (almost 1.5 billion euros) in 2019. Apart from domestic local investment, there has been significant foreign investment from the European Union (Germany and Italy).

The communist period redefined the city and urban areas in new ways according to its purpose and ideology (Hațegan and Petroman 2008). Industrial areas were opened in central areas and their presence (mostly demolition) shapes the urban development in central areas until today with investors tearing down the factories and developing these plots into real estate projects in the heart of the city. This development creates the conditions for spatial segregation in Timișoara and the privatisation of housing in new real estate complexes. In the transformation from socialism

to capitalism we observe how in a society with a former strong emphasis on equality and housing as a basic right a shift takes place towards an unequal distribution and the commodification of housing. Over the past twenty years in accordance with Timișoara's new urban development, many of the factories have been demolished and new buildings have taken their place. One of these recent projects is the ISHO real estate building complex, which covers an area of thousands of square metres and offers besides high-end apartments also office spaces in which for example BOSCH has their premises. The urban planning strategy and housing policies implemented by the local administration fuel this development.

The city of Timișoara has made it its task and goal to turn the city into a vibrant centre in Europe that is attractive to tourists, international students, expats and foreign investors. Therefore, all policies and decisions made at a political level are directed towards this purpose and at the realisation of this aim. The current mayor, Dominic Fritz, started his election campaign in 2020 with a strong focus on the European image and multi-cultural identity of the city and promised to invest into and to promote its economic, social, cultural and urban development. In his political agenda in his raise for mayor, Dominic Fritz promised the local population a city of neighbourhoods, a metropolitan city, an European city. In point four point four of his campaign "A city built for people" he claimed:

We will implement a modern and sustainable urban planning in Timișoara, which will prioritise green space and quality public spaces. The administration will become an active and involved partner that will ensure that urban real estate developments are made for the city and in the interest of its inhabitants. Timișoara does not have to choose between urban development and the environment, it needs sustainable urban development.⁹

Since then and over the past two years Timișoara has gotten even more a certain image and idea that is attached to the name and is diffused by its representatives. Catchphrases include: vibrant, dynamic, diverse, innovative, fast-growing, European, global, and metropolitan. This process of ascribing a certain identity to a city or place has been called 'place branding' or relating to the place of the city, 'city branding' in urban studies literature. This field that is still young but has received more and more attention over the past years. Cities such as New York, London, San Francisco, Paris, and Amsterdam are often referenced and presented as successful examples. When we think about each one of them a certain image comes to our mind and defines our associations and emotions connected to these places. Just as with Starbucks and iPhones, places can become the subject of marketing processes and can become a brand. Thus, the term city or place branding describes the process of developing a place into a brand so that visitors and investors are attracted and locals identify with their community and enjoy working and living there.

At its heart, city branding is about selective truth. It exaggerates what is desirable and hides what is not. As summarised by Cleave, McCauley, and Arku (2017, 3): "A place brand is the selective and symbolic image (or reputation) of a place held by the consumer (such as talent, residents, businesses, and investors) and the city". It is about strategically selecting certain characteristics (European, vibrant, diverse) and distracting from problems in the city. In the historic centre and around the three main squares in Timișoara a huge restoration wave has been in progress in the past ten years which is almost completed. Now the neighbouring districts are slowly in the spotlight: Iosefin, Elisabetin and the Fabric neighbourhood. Especially in the latter conflicts are and will be arising in the close future with the negative consequences of gentrification and segregation becoming apparent.

The urban planning today is essentially about “the money that can be made”. Space is annihilated. Inequalities are ignored and poorer parts of society are not even part of the picture. This has real consequences for instance in the housing policies that the government pursues. Volcan sarcastically remarked in the interview: “We do not talk about excluded communities. We just want ‘clean’ and ‘civilised’”. Hence, we also have to ask the question of who the urban planning is made for. What kind of residents do civil servants and property developers have in mind when they plan new projects? Segregation and maybe even gentrification are two processes that already shape and will continue to define certain districts in Timișoara and that have to be analysed in more detail on the basis of different changes in the city. Andreea told me during our conversation: “A bit of gentrification is always nice, no? A cozy cafe, local products, and a real bakery. I do not mind. (pauses) As long as I can still afford the rents of course (laughs)”. What happens to the people who cannot afford to live in the areas that they are currently living in? When people are pushed out of neighbourhoods that are now declared ‘hip’ and become the target of racism and house evictions?

Segregation and housing unevenness in the city of Timișoara – Whose Right to What City?

The influx of capital is forming the structure of a city. Having visited Timișoara fifteen years ago and returned four years ago the first change that struck me were the new apartment complexes and construction sites that I saw. But the built environment is only the first, visual development that can be observed and which gives hints on deeper laying changes, including the flows of ideas and people as well as the social and class segregation of citizens. At the same time, all those developments are closely interrelated. A city's economic structure and appearance might change through the impact of foreign investment. But the consequences expand further: to the private sphere, communal life, social mobility, and capital. In this section, I will argue that segregation goes beyond housing and the area one lives in. But it directly impacts life and the chances people have in life.

Two examples of uneven development and housing unevenness in the city of Timișoara will be analysed and contrasted. Located just two hundred metres from each other in the Fabric neighbourhood, the ISHO project and the Traian square have already been mentioned throughout this paper. The Fabric neighbourhood used to be a working-class neighbourhood that was neglected after the 1990s. Today it is characterised by a claim to gentrify. The movement is fast-forward. The district and its developments are analysed at the intersection of space, race, and class which, as tangled threads, run through the analysis. In the case of ISHO, the spatial dimension and the class composition of its target group are at the forefront. The racialisation of housing and segregation and the polarisation of society is at the centre of the study of the Traian square. Both processes can be observed as “a product of the political economy of actually existing socialism's transformation into neoliberal capitalism” (Vincze and Zamfir 2019, 443). The emergence of the production of private housing as we see it in the case of ISHO and the gentrification of the Traian square area has become possible in the same phase of Timișoara's uneven development. While at one end the new middle class is moving into their newly acquired high-end luxury apartments, at the other end low-income Roma families are pushed out of the houses that they had rented over the past decade. This connection further shows how housing unevenness is a product of uneven urban development, which is becoming “an endemic feature of capitalism in space” (Vincze and Zamfir 2019, 443). As Rudolf Gräf said: “Luckily there is now enough money for this kind of development”. Thus, in the following, we will see the reality of what lies behind the question that

we have to ask: Whose right to what city?

The following analysis is not only based on the data collected in the interviews with experts in the field of the urban development of the city, but also on my personal observations that I made during my walks through Timișoara. Using methods of urban landscape interpretation and visual analysis, the information gathered is analysed using the city as text method (see Duncan 2004; Helbrecht 2004). The route that I often took from the city centre to the Fabric neighbourhood, passing ISHO on the way, will be the red thread of the following analysis.

Production of private housing – The ISHO real estate project

“ISHO, landmark of tomorrow’s Timișoara. ISHO is a contemporary alternative to what it means to live in the city, a redefinition of urban space, combining harmony, modernity, and lifestyle”¹⁰.

When I set out in 2021 for my tour of the city, I started at Piața Unirii (Union Square) in the historical centre and left the baroque buildings behind me. Walking down Take Ionescu – the main street that connects the centre with the Fabric neighbourhood – and then further leads out to the highway, I passed the former fortress and then was surrounded by socialist blocks on the left and the right of the street. Finally, to my right, a huge wall of glass appeared in front of me, with the logos of BOSCH and Raiffeisen Bank on top of it. Located at the entrance to the Fabric district was the ISHO real estate project: A whole complex of office and residential buildings. Some construction work was still in progress but the outer structure of all eight buildings was completed. The architecture was dominated by glass and metal, white and grey colour schemes, and cubic forms. It had indeed become a landmark and an icon in the urban landscape of Timișoara and especially the central area. It also was the first project of this kind for the Fabric district, which triggered new developments and a change in the structures of the social and economic composition of this part of town. Not only by bringing companies such as BOSCH into the neighbourhood, but by deeply being a part of processes of housing unevenness and spatial segregation in the district. It was the physical and geographical embodiment of neoliberal urban development under capitalist influence. Promoting the ISHO project as the “landmark of tomorrow’s Timișoara” and “the future of living” not only touches on the concept of transformation, but also stands for an iconic architecture of “distinctive symbolic and aesthetic significance” (Sklair and Gherardi 2015, 51), as an expression of the arising capitalist middle class or as Leslie Sklair calls it: the transnational capitalist class (Sklair 2005). Part of this class is the corporate fraction, the state fraction, the technical fraction, and the consumerist fraction. The missing group in this conceptualisation are the ones who are addressed by those real estate projects. On the backdrop of the theoretical framework installed by Sklair on the capitalist class and its built environment, the ISHO estate exemplifies the development of Timișoara’s built landscape and shows how the increase of inequalities becomes visible in the city. Class and spatial segregation, as well as an unevenness in housing, become apparent, not only observed in isolation but especially when looked at in contrast to the second development in the Fabric neighbourhood around the Traian square.

In the ISHO project we can observe how the right to home and housing becomes a commodity in the neoliberal market. As Marx (1844, italics in original) realised: “Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it— when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., — in short, when it is *used* by us. ... In place of *all* these physical and mental senses, there has therefore come the sheer estrangement of all these senses— the sense of *having*”. Possession and private property

continue to be what matters in urban contexts today. The transformation from a socialist to a market-oriented economy has deeply impacted on the housing structure in Romania in general and in Timișoara in particular through the creation of inequalities in housing. The privatisation of housing has left property prices and rents to the market. Social housing has become almost non-existent. Today it is under 2% (Popovici 2020, 100) in the country. At the same time, the asking prices of homes have been rising constantly in Romania. These numbers show us which roles housing and the built environment play in capitalism. Following this logic, the housing market and the built landscape open up a framework in which capital accumulation (Harvey 2007a, 2007b) can proceed. Privatisation, real estate development, and marketing are the results that we can then observe, for instance in the case of the ISHO project.

ISHO is a project by the real estate development firm Mulberry Development founded by Ovidiu Sandor, which had before realised office complexes such as the Business Centre in Timișoara and The Office in Cluj. Presenting itself as a nationally and internationally active and successful firm, Mulberry Development is one of the actors of the corporate fraction profiting from capitalist development in constructing working and living places for companies, their representatives, and their employees. ISHO is its most recent and biggest real estate project regarding capital and size. The construction has started in 2016 and now, seven years later, is almost completed. 1,200 “highly desirable apartments”, 50,000 sq.m. of “smart offices” and a “world-class” hotel are part of the building complex, offering as stated on the website of the project “the perfect mix of top-class services”. The architecture promotes a modern and individualistic way of building combined with a lifestyle consisting of sport, nature, sustainability, and quality as a representation of the people moving into those places: the local capitalist middle class. The message exaggerated is: You work for a transnational and prestigious company like Bosch? – You need to live in a place meeting the standards of the globalised (equals modern) world. It is finance capitalists, developers, investors, and the state who decide the development of the city. As Harvey (2006) underlines: “These are the primary agents that shape our cities for us and therefore shape us” (Harvey 2006, 89). Within this analysis, it becomes clear that the built environment is not an isolated part of the city but very much conveys a message and is a statement in itself. In particular, the promotion of living which crosses the limits of private life, housing, and its policy produces an all-encompassing unevenness in the city from spatial and social to cultural segregation. The self-promotion of ISHO refers to its locality, the city of Timișoara:

ISHO is a large multifaceted real estate project comprising (...) more than 7,500 sq.m. of parks and green areas, top rated services, as well as cultural and sports amenities. ISHO is a brand-new neighbourhood in its own right bringing back to life one of the best residential areas in Timișoara and upgrading, thus, the entire city.¹¹

ISHO is an expression of the greater urban development of the whole city and defines itself as a pioneer in that regard. As Vincze and Zamfir (2019) notice for Maurer Panoramic in Cluj, ISHO as well uses a certain way of urban branding. It claims to offer “a unique housing concept in Timișoara” and on its homepage reads: “ISHO transforms Timișoara”. It was designed to “become a landmark of tomorrow’s Timișoara” and to upgrade the entire city. But whose city is here addressed? What kind of city do they envision? Living in the city for these developers means sustainability and activity:

ISHO is Timișoara’s most vibrant neighbourhood, the future urban centre of the city. Here you will find the best services in the city, so you can enjoy your free time the way you deserve. ISHO promotes a sustainable and balanced way of life, being designed for bikes and having top-level sports facilities promoting a healthy lifestyle right in the city centre.¹²

Firms such as Mulberry Development are not constructing one building, but a whole concept. As Popovici (2020) also observes in regard to the developments in the capital Bucharest, Harvey (2006) argues, capital accumulation creates not only spaces “but different forms of spatiality” (Harvey 2006, 77). Different classes are segregated in the urban landscape. While the new middle class that works for international firms has sufficient income to buy one of the flats in the ISHO complex (where they are starting from 140,000 euros and go up to 750,000 euros), those with lower capital have to remain visitors to these neighbourhoods. In the new urban development projects, spatial and class segregation intersect with housing unevenness in the city. When aesthetics, lifestyle, access to goods, and global flows of ideas meet, class polarisation plays out in all spheres of economic, social, and cultural life. ISHO is not the only project of this kind and stands at the beginning of a development that will accelerate in the upcoming years and shape the urban landscape of Timișoara decisively.

Capitalist globalisation in the city of Timișoara has resulted in an intensified social, class, and spatial polarisation and segregation of the city. The fixation on private property directly influences the unevenness of housing. In the mentality of capitalism, this development makes perfect sense. In the built environment and the belief in residential property, capital finds the means to further accumulate. Civil servants favour, promote and facilitate this development with their neoliberal *ideological baggage*. Timișoara, as a modern city, looks more and more as expected by global processes and corporate interest, rather than as expected by the inhabitants of that space. Not only space but also spatiality is newly defined. Certainly, there is a part of society, the middle class that is addressed through the promotion and marketing of projects like ISHO and who will then move into these ‘vibrant’ neighbourhoods. But there is a greater part of society that remains excluded from these spaces. This analysis has shown how class polarisation, spatial segregation and housing unevenness become the consequences of a privatisation of urban life. It has also already been getting apparent that this segregation goes beyond geography and space but is intertwined with the private space, basic rights, and equal access to goods and opportunities. This observation will be developed and drawn in more detail in the following two parts of this chapter. Closely related and directly opposed to this development and new building project, just two hundred metres away we observe another example of the consequences of global capitalist impact and neoliberal urban development in the Fabric district around the neighbouring Traian square.

Racialisation of housing – The Piața Traian

Continuing my walk from the ISHO project and crossing the bridge over the Bega I reached the historical part of the district. Many houses required restoration and many buildings were up for sale. Some construction works were already ongoing or had been completed. The street was very busy with people sitting in front of the houses, standing and chatting on the streets. Along the main street, I noticed a bakery and a bicycle store which seemed to have newly opened and felt a little out of place. Then on the main square, the Piața Traian I saw a speciality coffee shop, a hip burger place, and a small bar selling craft beer. These developments in Traian square over the last three years can be understood under the theory of ‘city-branding’ which is often referenced in the context of gentrification. They will not be the last ones but just one in a line of many in the upcoming years. Here, we can observe gentrification as it is unfolding; a development and term that will be discussed further in the course of the following analysis of the neighbourhood.

In the past five years the area within the Fabric neighbourhood around the central square called Piața Traian has received more and more attention, cumulating in last year's announcement of a (re)development plan by current mayor, Dominic Fritz who has announced on Facebook:

We begin the transformation of the Traian area, the most challenging urban regeneration project of a historical space of Timișoara. Today, the Traian area is unattractive and unjustly avoided. We are changing this and restoring the importance and charm of this historic district of Timișoara. Four squares and 12 streets – over 56,000 sqm of public space – are being redesigned to make room for pedestrian areas, green spaces, footpaths and bicycle paths, recreation areas.¹³

He has launched the project called “Regenerare urbană – Zona Piața Traian” (Urban Regeneration – Area Piața Traian). The aim here again is to shape the city according to European role model cities, with the square being the central meeting space of the community. The consequences such regeneration may have for the social structure and the current inhabitants of this area are not mentioned nor considered anywhere. The area that the mayor calls ‘unattractive’ (by his own judgment?) is quite highly frequented and lively when you pass through. It is of course nicer to speak of regeneration than of gentrification – which will most likely be the outcome of such a development project. The people who are at the moment living in that neighbourhood are mostly Roma and belong to a disadvantaged part of society. Discrimination against Roma in Romania is historically embedded. There are reports from other Romanian cities (FCDL 2019) where Roma families have been purposely evicted from their houses under false pretenses. In Timișoara this has happened as well, most notably in the Traian area where the former mayor Robu showed up in-person in 2018 to send people out of their homes¹⁴. While this has been a very open presentation of racism enacted, the current administration goes different ways. Although the former mayor was less sensitive to what other parts of Europe will think of him, Dominic Fritz could not risk such publicity. One can also surmise a lack of care for the welfare of people who will not be able to afford higher rents. For the greater good of creating a global European city with the according appearances, a small group can be sacrificed. In the discourse around this area on political as well as local civil society levels a racialisation of housing can be observed.

The mayor's public presentation in the district included pictures and installations of how the area will look after its ‘regeneration’. The images depict people sitting in cafes, reading books outside, riding bikes, walking dogs, shopping, and children playing. What we do not see in these pictures are the current majority of inhabitants of the area. Roma people are erased from these idealised versions of Piața Traian. They are excluded from the urban developer's visionary city. Thus, these are at the same time the pictures of a clean city, a ‘white’ city. Today, it is the local government itself that decides to ignite the ‘regeneration’ of this area, a term “mainly indicating spatial and social cleansing” (Vincze and Zamfir 2019, 455). The promotion of this ‘regeneration’ is inherently “a racialized act as it refers not only to the buildings but also to the people inhabiting them” (Vincze and Zamfir 2019, 455). The current residents of the Piața Traian area are largely Roma who were assigned to these less attractive areas during the socialist period. After 1990, the restitution of property was oriented towards a Westernised concept of property (Popovici 2020), and the privatisation of housing disadvantaged many low-income households. The neglect of the area continued until a public agenda of the past five to ten years caused it to gain new attention. Discrimination against Roma in Romania is a widely discussed problem. Public debates revived stereotypes, making racism socially acceptable. Furthermore, they are now affected by neoliberal approaches and the restoration of historical houses in the central areas – which were assigned to non-professional working class Roma under socialism. When it seems profitable to the owners and approached by government officials or investors they get rid of the former inhabitants, sell

or renovate and re-rent to much higher prices. The ones who then buy or move into the houses can afford the new prices and ascribe a different identity to the neighbourhood. Hence, space and race become entangled.

Urban 'regeneration' takes its most extreme form in the house evictions of the inhabitants. Evictions have been observed by activist groups and NGOs in all bigger Romanian cities (see FCDL 2019) and have also been the case in Timișoara. The evictions took place until late 2020 when the new government took office which chose to follow a different path in restructuring the Piața Traian area. Incidents like the Robu eviction are not exceptional, but one symptom of a general trend that will intensify over the next five to ten years beyond the Fabric area to Timișoara and Romania. What is special about the development that we observe here is the racial component that is defining the segregation that takes place. It does not necessarily have to be evictions that are carried out by the police and are the most extreme, the most violent and the most physical form of displacement. But people are forced in different ways to leave their houses and to move to other parts, mostly the peripheries of the city. Rising rents caused by newly-built projects such as ISHO in the same district or the restoration of existing houses force disadvantaged people to move. In the Piața Traian area, the displaced tenants are mostly Roma who have to find a new place. Their precarious situation is worsened by politicians who instrumentalise stereotypes for populist purposes. However, discrimination against Roma still exists in society and manifests in them being denied housing by landowners.

Moreover, the idea of the square as the embodiment of European traditions of public life and space is reactivated in the policies surrounding Traian square. Again we have seen the role politicians and the local administration play in shaping the landscape and the social structure of the city. "Regeneration" as they call their projects and plans for what they define a "not well maintained", "unattractive and unjustly avoided" and "dangerous" neighbourhood have real consequences for the disadvantaged residents. In promoting their plans, a picture of a whitewashed neighbourhood becomes visible. This vision erases the Roma from the urban reality. Race operates here as a tool in the urban re-structuring of the city.

The far reach of segregation and the (re-)production of social inequality: Education and culture

"I am a mother myself and of course I want the best education possible for my daughter. She will start school next summer and we do not yet know which school we want her to go. Of course I would not think twice if I had the money (laughs)."

– Andreea

"I am putting aside 1000 euro every month. My son is three years old now. When he starts school I want him to go to British school. He needs to learn English. Then he can have the best opportunities in life."

– Can¹⁵

The socio-spatial segregation in the city is connected to public spaces and services. The place that we live in and that we have access to defines also the goods, cultural offerings, and public services that we can access. It determines the chances we have in life. While Marx focused predominantly

on the objective account of social class where economy was the sole reason for social inequality, I will build up on Bourdieu's explanation of social inequality where culture and power come into play. As he underscored, "The socialized body (which one calls the individual or person) does not stand in opposition to society; it is one of its forms of existence" (Bourdieu 1980, 29). Thus, it is both subjective and objective. Neoliberalism in the city does not only shape the economic structure and the geographical landscape. It permeates the social life of the city's inhabitants, privatising public services and thereby entrenching social inequality. While Andreea can not even consider sending her daughter to the newly opened private school, The British International School of Timișoara, because she does not have the means, Can who moved to Romania from Turkey and is working for Continental starts to save up money early in order to send his son to this school in the future. I will examine in this chapter how in addition to urban, economic, and spatial segregation comes another uneven development of social inequality. Health, infrastructure, public transportation, and education are sectors where for-profit actors enter the urban arena and where the state is withdrawing funds and backing out of responsibilities. Fundamental rights are impacted by the neoliberal logic of privatisation in cities.

As part of equal access to education, the British International School of Timișoara, which falls under the ISHO project, is the example that I will analyse. Part of the lifestyle promoted and successfully adopted is the social and cultural aspect of education. The trend goes that parents are hesitating to give their children to public kindergartens and schools, but pay between 1,000 to 2,000 RON (200-400 euros) per month and send their kids to private kindergartens and schools. Part of this development is the opening of The British International School of Timișoara (BIST) located on the ISHO complex in 2020. The school's curriculum is based on the British educational system, all courses are taught in English and the qualifications are internationally recognised. The chair of the school board is the same man that leads Mulberry Development: Ovidiu Sandor. His idea is "to build one of the best schools in the country and to create a centre of excellence in international education"¹⁶. The school is described as a cutting-edge project, as "world-class" education, and as providing "the foundation on which our children can flourish". For those benefits the parents need to pay high sums; for each year the annual school fee varies from 6,500 to 8,700 euros. Hence, a full eleven-year education at this institution will cost a parent a total amount of 93,700 euros – which is absurd. However, the logic emerges when we analyse the development through the lens of capital surplus disposal. Urbanisation and the whole new lifestyle and services that go along with it changed in ways that could absorb vast surpluses (Harvey 2008). Or as Harvey (2008) puts it as well: "Quality of urban life has become a commodity for those with money" (Harvey 2008, 8). Those who do not own that kind of money and do not have access to the places from which the capital origins are excluded from the new living places and areas of new urban life.

In the analysis of ISHO we have already seen how free time activities, sport facilities, cultural events and consumerist options become part of the building concept. It expands beyond the built landscape but encompasses lifestyle, health, education, and culture. As David Harvey (2006, 102) observes: "Modes of consumption here become geographically differentiated according to concentrations of wealth and power [...] and cultural differentiations can either be transformed or actively produced that generate niche markets". Education becomes a niche market, where the capital that is acquired can be spent and turned into the profit of private companies again. On the other end stand the children who can access this kind of "world-class" education through their parents' wealth. They most likely will follow in their footsteps, maybe study abroad at privileged colleges, and in the end contribute their part to the capitalist market. Bourdieu observes that geographic location can play an important role in the field of power as one could be nearer to cultural capital than others. He further focuses on social reproduction as being central to class

divides (rather than means of production) and defines cultural capital as the basis for social reproduction (Bourdieu 1980). Not only economic capital but social and cultural capital are formative in inequalities in society. To requote Harvey (2008), “How we view the world and define possibilities depends on which side of the tracks we are on and to what kinds of consumerism we have access to”. Capitalism, as all-compassing, defines where we live, what we consume, and how we think. In the neoliberal city, private actors with the help of the local administration shape the built environment, influence the economic structure of society, and impact which people live in which neighbourhood. But beyond these functions, they are involved in the privatisation of public services and public space which frames the opportunities people have in life. Education is only one example; health and public health services are another where we see privatisation taking place and private companies providing services that should normally be universal but now become the right of the wealthy.

Conclusion – the cost of becoming global

“Man’s most consistent and on the whole, his most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart’s desire. But, if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself.” (Park & Burgess 1967, 3)

From the nineteenth and twentieth century, sociologists like Engels (1952), Simmel (1903/2002), Park and Burgess (1967), and Weber (1958/2002) have analysed and criticised the changes of places and personas in rapid urbanisation. Today, possibly more than ever before, we can observe the effects of globalisation and urbanisation in locations as small as 400,000-inhabitant-cities as Timișoara. Whether Second Empire Paris in 1860, New York City one hundred years later, or Timișoara today, the urban process has always been closely related to capitalism. Whereas cities have often been analysed as a mere frame and another scale of globalisation and the globalisation of capital, this paper aimed at bringing into the theoretical picture the experience on the ground and critically questioned ‘Western’-based concepts of the global city. Cities, which would not have had a part in Saskia Sassen’s definition of the global city in 1991, show the effects of global, capitalist, and neoliberal developments today. The built environment, the segregation of cities, social inequalities, and a new idea of modern lifestyle have been consequences analysed in this essay. Taking into consideration the everyday experience of city inhabitants makes it possible to see how urban processes are shaped by neoliberal development.

The locality of Timișoara, a city located in the West of Romania and with a socialist past, has been the field of my research and the place of intersection where I analyse the interplay of capitalism, globalisation, neoliberal housing and urban development strategies. At the confluence of these phenomena is segregation in its making. As such, this was a unique observational opportunity as the development in Timișoara has only recently started with a future intensification of these processes on the horizon. Thus, this work aimed to contribute to an analysis and broader understanding of segregation and how cities are shaped by global processes. It also constituted a call to political actors to intervene and initiate a policy shift to include poorer parts of the population in city planning considerations and bolster the social housing stock once more. In this paper, we have followed Timișoara’s endeavour to become a global city. This image of globality is characterised by its European image, investment of foreign companies (decisive for its economic uprising), a modern, clean, and attractive urban appearance, and an international, educated, and trend-conforming population. Urban planning and housing policies are directed accordingly.

Finally, we have seen, how in Timișoara under the strategy of “making a global city”, capitalist transformation and city planning policies resulted in segregation. This segregation encompasses different categories such as class and race and impacts social and economic structures, housing, and access to culture and education, which produces social inequality.

As Levine (2016) has very accurately observed: “Urban patterns are not inevitable” (Levine 2016, 13). On the opposite, they are actively shaped. They are made by the ones who have the power to decide about the landscape that they prefer to realise and which patterns this development must follow in order to achieve this goal. An important goal is to attract foreign investment which is seen as the ultimate securing of economic welfare for the city. Capitalism and the capitalist mode of production in relation to the urban process are interrelated with themes of accumulation and class struggle as has been underlined many times in reference to Marxist geographer David Harvey.

Who has the right to the city of Timișoara in times of the globalised neoliberal city? The answer seems to be: only those who comply with the image of the metropolitan citizen and belong to the right class and race. While Lefebvre criticised the consequences of rapid urbanisation, he also identified in urbanisation an enormous positive potential that could lead to the formation of an emancipated urban society within the framework of an urban revolution.

This essay contributes not only to reviewing the experience of a larger scale of cities as claimed by Robinson, but is also a call and warning for the question of how we want to live, now and in the future. Burgess and Park's introductory phrase becomes even more important today when cities of varying sizes and geographies are dominated by privatisation, uneven housing, racialised policies, and class divisions. I conclusively want to join David Harvey (2008) in his support of the right to the city “to claim some kind of shaping power over the processes of urbanization, over the ways in which our cities are made and re-made and to do so in a fundamental and radical way” (Harvey 2008, 2). In doing so, inhabitants reclaim their right to create a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality as one of the most precious of all human rights. Finally, to interfere and counteract at the very beginning of the shaping of divisions in a city. Thus, this paper also includes a call on the local government to see these developments while they are still in the early stages – but which will worsen in the upcoming years – and to implement pre- and intervention measures in the housing market and a shift in urban planning policy. In this context, the development of the city of Timișoara and its landscapes, and the reactions of its people must carefully be observed and followed in the upcoming years.

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Notes

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²Quote from the interview conducted as part of my research in Timișoara in summer 2021. In total seven expert interviews were part of the research with two civil servants (Rudolf Gräf, Ruben Lațcău), two sociologists (Ovidiu, Temeia), two activists (Andreea, Dan) and one architect (Volcan). Except the two civil servants who were interviewed in their official function all names were changed. Past tense will be used when quoting from the interviews as the present tense tends to let observations seem always applying while this might be true only for that precise point in time and not true in the future. All the direct quotes reported in the paper come from audio recorded interviews with full consent from the participants.

³More specifically goal 11 "Sustainable cities and communities" to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable: sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11 (Accessed: 21 January 2023)

⁴More information available here: <https://urban-regeneration.worldbank.org/> (Accessed: 21 January 2023)

⁵Compare for example: The World Charter for the Right to the City; European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City; World Charter on the Right to the City.

⁶Information retrieved from: www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/14/romania-economy-booming (Accessed: 21 January 2023)

⁷Information retrieved from: web.archive.org/web/20161018223130/hsp://swisspointgroup.ro/en/timisoara-the-best-city-for-business-in-romania-in-forbes-top-2016/ (Accessed: 21 January 2023)

⁸Information retrieved from: www.forbes.ro/articles/locul-3-cele-mai-bune-zone-pentru-afaceri-romania-2021-drumul-spre-vest-212712 (Accessed: 21 January 2023)

⁹Information retrieved from and more information available at: www.dominicprimar.ro/program (Accessed: 21 January 2023)

¹⁰Quote from the website of ISHO, available at: <http://isho.ro/concept/> (Accessed: 21 January 2023), original: “ISHO, reper al Timișoarei de mâine. ISHO este alternativa contemporană la ceea ce înseamnă a locui în Oraș, o redefinire a spațiului urban, ce îmbină armonie, modernitate și lifestyle”

¹¹Quote from the website of ISHO, available at: <http://isho.ro/concept/> (Accessed: 21 January 2023)

¹²Quote from the website of ISHO, available at: <http://isho.ro/concept/> (Accessed: 21 January 2023)

¹³Information retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/dominicprimar/posts/pfbid0vmumtBsBVuM8xKtNkUZUUkhV3qfSTgYuWYHfSQYyYbsCMa3e5BWRqb4ZpYUAd8DF1> (Accessed: 21 January 2023)

¹⁴Nicolae Robu, mayor of Timișoara from 2011-2020. See also the report of Dreptul la Oraș on the incident: <https://dreptullaoratimisoara.com/essay/2018/10/22/dacilor-3-1.html> (Accessed: 21 January 2023)

¹⁵This quote was not part of the formal interviews but from informal conversations with a friend who works in the city.

¹⁶Information retrieved from the school's website: <http://britishschool-timisoara.ro/en/> (Accessed: 21 January 2023)

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