



An anti-capitalistic sign on a building in Penzlauerberg, Berlin (Retrieved from: <http://www.neopresse.com/wirtschaft/us-buerger-glauben-nicht-mehr-marktwirtschaft/>)

GENTRIFICATION POSITION PAPER

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This paper is about my position as a future architect. This position will hopefully contribute to my work, creating a better and more profound built environment in the future.

Next to what my architecture school at the Technical University of Delft is teaching me, I also have developed a personal view on how to design and intervene in the built environment. This view has been shaped during my whole life and will continue to change. As for many well known architects, traveling abroad has been a large influence on their experience and repertoire. Living abroad in Berlin for one semester, therefore influenced my view on the social side of architecture a lot.

The city of Berlin is now undergoing a rapid change, with a fast growing number of (international) inhabitants. With the unique history of the city, being the capital city of the German forces during the World War II and being divided in East and West, the city provides a lot of learning material for me and others. During my time there, I could experience the post communistic characteristics of the city. With the arrival of many new inhabitants, the rents are increasing very fast and neighborhoods are changing. This capitalistic response to the growth of the city, which is certainly inevitable, causes a lot of negative feelings and reactions under the post-communistic inhabitants.

Many neighborhoods have changed the past years. The neighborhood where I lived, Penzlauerberg, was a cheap but centrally living area in the city after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Now, it is one of the most fast changing area's. Old apartments are being renovated into luxury houses with much higher rents. With the current inhabitants having no larger budget, they are forced to relocated themselves and are being replaced by higher income groups. Not only a neighborhood is changing, many cultural area's are changing to make place for these new inhabitants. For the first time in my life, I was learning and experiencing that *gentrification* was a negative influence on a city.

My position in this paper will therefore be related to the responsibility of me as an architect in relation to the change in the social environment. The role as an architect, to design and manipulate space (Waldrep, 2014), is in great contrast to conserving an existing environment. A part of our architecture studies is to take into account the context of a building. This has been mainly about the history and context, but it is lacking a social point of view. In this paper I first will further explain what *gentrification* is, and I will give several types of interventions I can choose as an architect to deal with the social context of a project. Describing several types of interventions, taking the social context into account, will hopefully help me creating a profound argumentation when designing in the future.

Gentrification

In this part I will give a more clear description about the phenomenon *Gentrification*. *Gentrification* happens when a neighborhood has attractive qualities but remains relatively of low value. When the area becomes desirable to higher-income households or investors (the *gentrifiers*), they are changing the housing market. As the demand rises for the neighborhood, the higher-income group are able to outbid the lower-income group. The original inhabitants are experiencing a change in their living environment or are forced to live elsewhere (Bates, 2013). Although change and improvement of housing and physical environment happens all the time, it is not necessarily *gentrification*. *Gentrification* happens when neighborhoods change in such a way that longtime residents and businesses move out because of the strongly increasing land prices. Where communities had to fight hard to make improvements, it now happens easily because the new group of inhabitants are more powerful and have more money (Angotti, 2012).

What happens to the original inhabitants, is that they disappear into the vast metropolis. With the arrival of the new and wealthier income groups, the governments are not taking into account where they go or what happens to them. So *gentrification* is not only about the arrival of the new income groups, but also about how the original inhabitants are taken care of. The new and original inhabitants should seek common ground to improve the community in a way that does not force out residents or businesses. They need to develop their own control over land and expand local democracy by including all people (Angotti, 2012).



The exhibition of Spontaneous Interventions at the Venice Biennale in 2012
(Retrieved from: http://www.archdaily.com/268435/venice-biennale-2012-spontaneous-interventions-usa-pavilion/bnl_usa_6)

Changes in the urban environment can differ from renovating or building houses, to the arrival of new (cultural) facilities. It can also differ in who will take the initiative to make the change. When a change is needed for a long based community, this often happens slow by the initiative of the inhabitants. This phenomena is shown during the Venice Biennale in 2012, in the exhibition of the *spontaneous interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good*. However, as an architect, i could also recognize these common needs while designing a new space.

As a future architect, I consider myself responsible for satisfying not only the *gentrifiers* and their individual needs, but also satisfying the needs of the original inhabitants. In designing the future built environment, it is not only about the filling the empty spaces for the people who need it, it is also about the creation of new social spaces (Blokland & Savage, 2000). Spaces that take both stakeholders and newcomers into account. For this collaboration between the architect and the stakeholders is needed, to get a better view on what people want and need, and to avoid communities from leaving (Thwaites, Mathers & Simkins, 2013).

Strategies

Within the next paragraphs, I will describe several case studies, where the influence of the architect/organisator differs in each project. This will differ between having little influence on the design and letting the community be free, and having a lot of influence and only considering a completely new environment for the original inhabitants.

Not intervening or completely intervening

In this case study I refer to a community in Berlin that created their own space and housing in the middle of one of the most desirable areas. In the Tipi village of Kreuzberg, next to the Spree river, about 20 people live in basic tents. They have built their own housing and they have minimal hygienic facilities. This can be seen as a community in the middle of a *gentrified* area, that is untouched by external parties (e.g. architects). They have been provided with a temporary space, and they create their own housing and social facilities.

Sustaining this community is very hard. This free and open minded community, that has been created a just few years ago, have their own way of improving and living, but act as an island in another community. Not only the government, but also the surrounding community will have a big impact on their living, because this community is living within their spaces. As this community is very poor and the income difference is too big with the surrounding community, the chance of surviving for a long time is very small.

The potential influence of me as an architect on this plot is minimal. Helping the community in creating new spaces is not needed since they have a self organizing group which is not regulated by the government. They are an island in another neighborhood, and when space is needed for new incomers, the community is too small and too individual to take into account into a potential new design.



The Tipi Village in Berlin, in a gentrified neighborhood (Retrieved from: <http://wasteland-twinning.net/blog/wasteland-twinning-meets-teepee-land/>)

Providing a base for the community

When intervening in a neighborhood, it is also possible to intervene while supporting the existing community and enhancing the area. In this case, there is little room for actual gentrifiers, and the housing facilities for the more poor people will be supported.

Within the theories of *Incremental Housing*, the current user is the main contributor to the design (Lizarralde, 2010). Many examples of these types of housing for the poor are known. In relation to the subject of *gentrification*, this housing strategy should exclude the possibility of *gentrification*, followed by the movement of the poor people to other regions. With the support from external parties, housing is often made within the existing community, but also for the existing community. With this, the lower income groups do not have to move elsewhere but are able to stay in the same neighborhood.

As an architect, this role of creating a new basic living structure, is supporting the current community and not creating a *gentrification*-effect. The challenge behind this strategy, is to find a suitable way to finance the project or a strategy to make the current inhabitants able to finance their new housing. These responsibilities are normally not directly related to architects. Furthermore, these housing theories mostly apply to developing countries.



ELEMENTAL, social housing by Alejandro Aravena in Chile (Retrieved from: <http://www.archdaily.com/10775/quinta-monroy-elemental>)

Participative decision making

When designing something in a neighborhood, it is possible to take the values of the original inhabitants into the decision-making process. With letting the inhabitants of the neighborhood participate in the designing and decision making process, it can avoid the *gentrification* of an area.

Involving different kinds of people into the decision-making process, helps them to be more satisfied about a decision (Yearwood & Stranieri, 2012). When designing new (cultural) buildings in an area, it is important to take the different opinions of different income groups into account. This will not lead to the most ideal decision for every income group, but at least every voice is heard. The negative aspect of letting different groups take part in a design process, is that the process happens more slowly and is probably more costly.

When I would design a new building, I would be very interested in the opinion of the people living around the project and possibly the people living on the site of the redevelopment project. Their opinion gives a lot of information about the current atmosphere and how to maintain this atmosphere. However, there is not always enough room to let other people participate in the process, and this is probably a more costly alternative. Next to that, as an architect, it is too far fetched to have an influence on the referring market and the prices.

The Tabula Rasa strategy

The Tabula Rasa theory suggest that the architecture is built on a blank surface without any context (Maudlin & Vellinga, 2014). In relation to the subject of social change, this strategy means that when designing a new building, the social context is not taken into account. This will probably provoke a *gentrification*-effect to a neighborhood.

Before the 1990s, the context was of little importance to the architect and mainly the impact of the building was taken into consideration (Aureli, 2015). This did not include any social aspects into the building and did not consider the consequences on a social scale to a neighborhood. For this reason, this type of architecture is supporting the *gentrification* of an area.

During the 1990s, a shift found place towards a more socially concerned architecture. However, within this architecture, capitalism still plays an important role (Aureli, 2015). With capitalism shaping our society, *gentrification* is probably inevitable.

For me, designing with this strategy and taking no social context into consideration, will lead to a design which would probably provoke *gentrification* in an area. With this architecture a statement of change could be made. Cities will always change and maybe the communities should accept this change and move to another neighborhood.

My position as an architect regarding the context,

With the previously written strategies and background, it becomes clear that the role of an architect is not broad enough to have a complete influence on the *gentrification* of a neighborhood. The capitalistic market mechanism will lead to an increase of rents and will force a more poor group to other regions. This will change the community of an area. As an architect, I will be dependent on other institutions with regard to what kind of programme the new design will house. So, overall it is hard to have an influence. Next to that, a city will always change.

In order to have an influence on the *gentrification* of an area, I would have several options. When I would be chosen for a project that will definitely gentrify an area, I will always have the option not to design this building, in order of not personally contributing to the *gentrification*. Secondly, I would have the option to create awareness among the other parties, about the change of a community. With creating the awareness, the design-process could possibly make more room for local opinions. With involving the opinion of the people of the community, their are more likely to be content with the new building. Only, this does not necessarily stop the *gentrification*. In every case, I would like to hear the voices and opinions of people of the previous use, or the people of the surrounding area. I can take their opinion into account and let them influence my design choices.

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