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Selling Global Seoul: Competitive Urban Policy and Symbolic Reconstruction of Cities

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The paper focuses on a process of symbolic reconstruction of cities, where the existing image or meaning of places is purposely changed with the aim of attracting new investments, events or tourists to a particular city. The process of symbolic reconstruction is situated within the context of growing competition among cities. Symbolic reconstruction also affects tourism development in cities by providing an easily marketed and consumable image and meaning of places. The case of the Cheonggyecheon restoration in Seoul helps in understanding how symbolic reconstruction of cities is related to and affected by competitive urban policy, urban renewal and city marketing. Observing local consequences one can conclude that while the Cheonggyecheon restoration and resulting symbolic reconstruction of the city helped Cheonggyecheon to become the major tourist attraction and icon of global Seoul, it also resulted in a decline in local places and cultures. Such outcomes of urban renewal contradict strategic goals of urban policy and may prevail in the end over the benefits, which the Cheonggyecheon restoration brings to tourism development and everyday life in Seoul.

Key words: Cheonggyecheon, city marketing, Seoul, symbolic reconstruction, urban renewal, urban policy, tourism development

1. Introduction

Seoul, the capital of South Korea, is one of the world's largest cities. Together with the metropolitan region, it is home to more than 22 million residents, which accounts for almost half of the South Korean population. While the city is internationally praised as the "Miracle on the Han River" for its rapid economic growth and urban development in the past, it is largely overlooked that Seoul has recently been quickly expanding its cultural industry and becoming one of the top tourist destinations in East Asia. Nearly nine million foreign visitors came to Seoul last year and the impact of tourism on the economic growth, social structure and

urban development is growing. The metropolitan government seems to be well aware of the opportunities that tourism development brings to the city and has designated the tourism industry as one of the six growth engines that are expected to transform Seoul into a competitive global city. Although there is a growing interest in Seoul in the field of urban studies, including urban sociology in particular, little research has been done on Seoul as an emerging tourist destination. The growing impact of tourism on urban policy as well as on everyday life in Seoul remains rather unacknowledged so far.

The paper focuses on urban renewal and city marketing as two important instruments of urban policy in Seoul by which the metropolitan government tries to improve the economic competitiveness and global appeal of the city. Urban renewal and city marketing are also expected to boost tourism in Seoul (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2006; Kim and Kim, 2011). The urban policy of the metropolitan government used to be based on an assumption that the global position of Seoul could be significantly improved by efficient management and marketing of its strategic resources, which could eventually result in economic growth, urban development and better quality of everyday life (Seoul Development Institute, 2003; OECD, 2005). Yet urban renewal and city marketing also result in what we call *symbolic reconstruction of cities*, whereby the existing image or meaning of a particular place is purposely changed in order to attract new investments, events and tourists to the city. We suggest that symbolic reconstruction of cities, also referred to as re-signification or re-imaging of cities, offers a conceptual framework that allows us to study the relation between urban renewal and city marketing as instruments of urban policy in general and tourism development in particular, against the backdrop of growing competition among cities (Balibrea, 2001; Smith, 2005).

We take the *Cheonggyecheon restoration*, the most known recent large-scale transformation in Seoul, as a case to study the relation between urban policy, urban renewal and city marketing. During the Cheonggyecheon restoration, an ageing highway, crossing downtown Seoul, was torn down and an ancient stream was restored on its site, transforming in this way the stream into one of the most popular places in the city, affecting its everyday life and tourism development (Ryu, 2004; Cho, 2010; Križnik, 2010). The case allows us to study the consequences of urban renewal and city marketing on the everyday life and tourism development in Seoul. Yet the Cheonggyecheon restoration not only transformed downtown Seoul but also changed its image and meaning. Symbolic reconstruction, which resulted from the restoration, was related to a large extent to the aggressive city

marketing of the metropolitan government.[1] Although the Cheonggyecheon restoration positively affected the quality of everyday life and boosted tourism in Seoul, it also resulted in ongoing gentrification, decline of traditional industrial and service sectors and disappearance of local places and cultures. We argue that such undesirable outcomes, resulting from the instrumentalisation of Cheonggyecheon restoration for particular economic and political interests, contradict the initial goals of restoration, which was expected to improve everyday life and boost tourism in Seoul.

2. Cities competing globally, whatever it costs

Globalization of cities is not a one-way process, where success or failure of a particular city depends entirely on global forces that are supposedly beyond local control. While the structural transformation of the global economy, increasing cultural and political integration on a cross-national scale, and informatization of societies affect most of the cities around the world, the latter are not merely places where global flows of capital, goods and cultures are localized. At the same time, cities are the engines of the global economy and reproduce the global order as much as they are affected by it (Sassen, 2001). Due to the on-going structural changes in the global economy and national states, cities are forced to offer substantial financial, administrative and other incentives in order to attract global capital to a particular place. Attracting mobile global capital is often believed to be a precondition for faster local economic growth and urban development. Cities are becoming increasingly autonomous economic and political agents that actively respond to the pressures and opportunities of globalization. Consequently, it is the urban policy of cities – and not the global forces – which is the main source of social and urban change today (Smith, 2002; Short, 2004; Ong, 2011). Such urban policy is based on two assumptions. Firstly, it assumes that a city can improve its position against rivals by implementing efficient management of its strategic resources and assets.

[1] The paper focuses on the narratives representing Seoul and Cheonggyecheon, which purposefully aim to reconstruct their image and meaning. Those narratives are mainly framed by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and related institutions (Cho, 2010; Kim and Kim, 2011). Governmental documents, marketing campaigns and interviews with public officials, dating from 2003 to 2010, were the primary sources to study the background of the restoration and its impact on tourism development in Seoul. A field survey conducted in 2006 among 95 residents of Wangsimni was used to study the consequences that the restoration had on local places and cultures. The findings were compared to other studies on the Cheonggyecheon restoration (Ryu, 2004; Chung, 2009; Cho, 2010; Rowe, 2010). The narratives referred to in the paper are nonetheless used as illustrative rather than representative cases of how global Seoul is discursively constructed.

Secondly, a city also needs to be efficiently marketed to make potential investors and visitors aware of its comparative advantages. City marketing has thus become an integral part of competitive urban policy, and large financial and human resources are invested to promote a particular city as supposedly the most attractive business environment, the place of the finest quality of life or the most desired tourist destination (Smith, 2005; Kim and Kim, 2011). By attracting foreign investments, corporations, international events and tourists, a city is expected to benefit from economic growth, new jobs, urban development and better quality of everyday life. Many local governments even believe that a city can face the risk of economic and social decline if the city marketing falls short of anticipated results (Short and Kim, 1998).

However, there is little evidence that competitive urban policy necessarily leads to long-term economic growth or to just and sustainable urban development equally beneficial to different social groups in the city. On the contrary, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that the benefits of aggressive city marketing are distributed in a noticeably uneven way (Smith, 2002; Perrons, 2004). While it is true that competitive urban policy eventually results in construction of new public spaces, social amenities, infrastructure, and regenerated neighbourhoods, the long-term benefits of economic growth, generated by successful city marketing, often stay in the hands of a small political elite and private developers, known as "growth coalitions" (Logan and Molotch, 2007). Harvey (1989: 4) showed that the only certain short-term outcomes of what he calls a "shift to entrepreneurialism in urban governance" are uneven capital accumulation, speculative urban development, instrumentalisation of public-private partnerships, dominance of economic interests in urban management, and declining social and spatial cohesion in cities.

During the last two decades, city marketing gained a lot of attention as an instrument of competitive urban policy (Smith, 2005). City marketing focuses on promoting the economic competitiveness of a city, enhancing its global image and attracting new investments, events or tourists. One of the main goals of city marketing is "to construct a new image of the city to replace either vague or negative images previously held by current or potential residents, investors and visitors" (Holocomb, 1993: 133). In this sense, selling a city is no different than selling any other product. Cities are becoming increasingly commodified and the emphasis is less on promoting the actual qualities of a place than on selling its images. City marketing strategies range from conventional tools like dissemination of appealing slogans and logos to more sophisticated approaches, which integrate or-

ganization of important international events and conventions with construction of iconic urban projects. Although such practices vary in terms of scale and scope, they nevertheless aim to reconstruct the image and meaning of a particular place, which we refer to as the *symbolic reconstruction of cities*.[2]

Yet by reconstructing the meaning of a place, city marketing not only promotes its qualities but also legitimates the interests of dominant economic or political groups. New meanings promoted by city marketing "are not innocent of social authority and political power. The city is written from a particular perspective for a particular audience" (Short and Kim, 1998: 74). Cities try to show themselves as safe places with no conflicts, while existing environmental degradation or social injustice are rarely addressed and intentionally ignored. The potential allusion to the conflictive past that a place may invoke has to be reconstructed to the extent that "the end product loses its capacity to refer to a memory of capitalist exploitation and of the role that this exploitation has played in the city's current prosperity" (Balibrea, 2001: 190). Social groups and individuals that do not fit or oppose the symbolic reconstruction of a particular place, promoted by dominant economic or political actors, are marginalised or excluded from public life. Symbolic reconstruction of cities as a consequence of competitive urban policy thus serves as a new form of social and political domination and affects social polarization and denied political rights in cities (Cho, 2010).

Tourism development directly benefits from city marketing and resulting symbolic reconstruction of cities (Short, 2004). In this case, symbolic reconstruction plays a rather important role by providing easily consumable images and appealing meanings of a place following market trends in the tourism industry. Tourists, namely, tend to reduce their experience of place they visit to a "limited number of experiences" and demand a "coherent representation and meaning of a city, one that is easy and pleasant to consume" (Balibrea, 2001: 189). Yet city marketing alone, as an instrument of competitive urban policy, has limited success unless it is linked to the actual transformation of a city. Therefore, many cities construct iconic flagship projects and implement large-scale urban renewal strategies, which aim to replace seemingly rundown urban areas with new places of global spectacle, transforming the former into non-conflicting tourist attractions

[2] Balibrea (2001: 189) refers to symbolic reconstruction as a process of "resignifying the city", while Smith (2005: 403) talks about "re-imaging" of cities by means of connotations. Much of recent debate on symbolic reconstruction is focused on Barcelona, which has changed over the past two decades from a relatively less known regional centre into one of the most successful European cities. Symbolic reconstruction was instrumental in the profound and successful transformation of the city (Balibrea, 2001; Smith, 2005).

of mass consumption. Such urban development commodifies and turns cities into a spectacle for tourists that is deprived of historic authenticity and meaning (Urry, 2002). For residents, tourism development may eventually generate new jobs and improve environmental or living conditions, but it can also lead to gentrification, social segregation, community disintegration or decline of local places and cultures (Smith, 2002; Križnik, 2009a).

Now we want to turn our attention away from a general discussion on globalization and cities and focus on urban policy in Seoul, in order to see how urban renewal and city marketing have transformed the city into one of the leading cities and a top tourist destination in the world. In particular, we want to focus on the Cheonggyecheon restoration to uncover some of the consequences that the restoration and resulting symbolic reconstruction of the city have had on everyday life and tourism development in Seoul.

3. Towards a "clean and attractive global Seoul"

Seoul adopted an increasingly competitive urban policy during the last decade as the metropolitan government tried to challenge and improve the city's relatively low structural position in the global economy compared to other leading cities (Križnik, 2009b). While New York, London and Tokyo are widely recognized as holding the dominant position in the global economy, Seoul used to occupy a position of what Taylor (2004: 160) calls a "wannabe world city". According to Taylor (2004), cities subordinated to those already having a dominant role are facing stronger economic and political pressures caused by their drive to improve existing global rankings.[3] In Seoul, global pressures seem to be further accentuated by its overwhelming position in the national urban system and by a vast concentration of financial and human resources in the metropolitan region (Choe, 2005). Several studies show that the lower global ranking of Seoul was not only a consequence of its global position but also of its distinctive development in the past (Seoul Development Institute, 2003; OECD, 2005). Namely, compared to Western cities, Seoul experienced a late urbanization, which was managed by the national government. The rapid economic growth and urban development of the city were instrumentalized to have an effect on

[3] Taylor (2004: 73) ranks Seoul as the 41st in a classification based on a network analysis of global producer services. London had the highest index and was followed by New York, Hong Kong, Paris and Tokyo. However, recent studies reveal the growing economic and political importance of Seoul in the global economy. Global Power City Index 2011 lists Seoul as the 7th among surveyed cities for its "comprehensive power to attract creative people and excellent companies from around the world amidst accelerated interurban competition" (Mori Memorial Foundation, 2011).

national growth (Hill and Kim, 2000). The metropolitan government thus had limited control over the city and paid little attention to the negative environmental and social outcomes of the rapid economic growth and urban development. After the introduction of local autonomy in 1995 its role had significantly changed and the metropolitan government became the key actor effecting the economic growth and urban development in Seoul. The urban policy gradually shifted from unrestricted development towards what is promoted as the "balanced urban development" of the city (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2006).

As a consequence of developmental shifts, the metropolitan government has paid a lot of attention to the preservation of the natural environment and cultural heritage over the last decade. Seoul possesses natural and cultural heritage that is, unlike that in other cities, exceptionally well located, which is an important resource for tourism development and everyday life in the city. While it is easily accessible to the residents, the OECD (2005) study concluded that the rich natural and cultural heritage used to be poorly marketed, invisible to tourists, and had had a limited influence so far over the economic competitiveness and global appeal of Seoul. The study recommended that "in order to continue to play the role of national economic leader and reinforce its international competitiveness, Seoul must attend to improvements in its spatial development, urban environment and quality of life" (OECD 2005: 59). Rich natural and cultural heritage is therefore an important asset for tourism development in Seoul. Along with financial services, digital content, ICT, biotechnical, design and the fashion industry, the metropolitan government has designated the tourism and convention industry as one of the "six new growth engines" that are expected to transform Seoul into a "clean and attractive global city" (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2006: 26). The impact of the tourism industry in Seoul is in fact growing. In 2010, almost nine million visitors arrived to Seoul, less though than the ambitious goal set by the metropolitan government, which wants to see twelve million visitors a year. However, while Seoul was virtually unknown as a tourist destination two decades ago, it has become one of the most popular cities to visit in East and South East Asia in the meantime.[4] The city also serves as the gateway for the vast majority of foreign visitors to Korea. In comparison to Barcelona, which is considered as a top tourist destination, Seoul has displayed a similar growth of visitors during the last decade (Table 1).

[4] For three consecutive years, Seoul was selected as the most wanted city to visit in a survey, which AC Nielsen conducts in China, Japan and Thailand (Lee, 2011).

Table 1. Visitors to Seoul and Barcelona from 2000 to 2010

	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
Seoul	5,321,792	5,347,468	5,818,138	6,155,046	6,890,841	8,797,658
Barcelona	3,141,162	3,580,986	4,549,587	6,709,175	6,659,075	7,133,524

Source: Barcelona Turisme (2011: 7), Seoul Metropolitan Government (2011: 346).

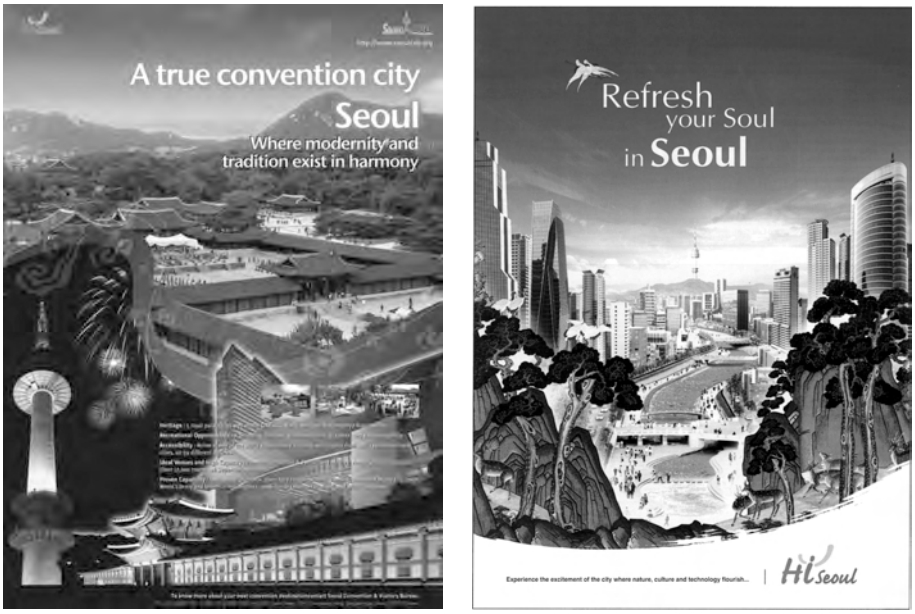
Due to the growing economic importance of the tourism industry, city marketing used to be considered as one of the three main strategies that need to be implemented "in order to attract more foreign tourists and foreign direct investment" (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2006: 15). The metropolitan government is investing substantial financial and human resources in the city marketing and promotion of Seoul as an attractive tourist destination that differs from nearby rivals like Singapore or Hong Kong. In order to be able to carry out extensive overseas marketing campaigns, the metropolitan government increased the marketing budget by 750% in 2008 (Kim and Kim, 2011). Today, the total spending on tourism and culture accounts for almost EUR 55 million, which is 3.6% of the total municipal budget (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2011: 552). Marketing campaigns are particularly focused on the neighbouring countries, which represent the main market for the tourism industry in Seoul due to their geographic proximity and cultural similarities (Lee, 2011).[5] Another important source of tourism development in Seoul is the rapid expansion of convention tourism. Seoul ranked 5th among the most important "international meeting cities in 2010", for instance, outdoing Barcelona or Tokyo (UIA, 2011).

Growth of tourism directly affects urban development in Seoul. The metropolitan government's plan to transform Seoul into a competitive and attractive global city is focused on integration of tourism development with the "revitalization of downtown Seoul as a center for economy and tourism" on the one hand and on seemingly necessary development of what is called "tourist attractions with global competitiveness" on the other (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2006: 26). The ongoing transformation of downtown Seoul includes the new Gwanghwamun Square, connecting the ancient Gyeongbokgung Palace with the Namdaemun Gate, development of special tourism zones in Myeongdong, Insadong, and Cheonggyecheon, a planned green corridor between the Jongmyo Royal Shrine and Namsan Mountain and the ongoing construction of the iconic Dongdaemun Design

[5] It seems that a large investment in city marketing does indeed attract more visitors to Seoul and has an effect on their spending, which increased by 89% from 2006 to 2010 (Lee, 2011).

Plaza. Next to the transformation of downtown, the metropolitan government also introduced a large-scale urban renewal initiative, New Town Development, which was expected to address existing imbalances in economic growth and urban development between different parts of the city and thus improve the quality of life in Seoul (Križnik, 2009a). The most successful urban renewal project in terms of long-term impact on economic growth and urban development in Seoul, as well as anticipated expansion of tourism, is nonetheless the *Cheonggyecheon restoration*, which we will discuss in detail later on.

Image 1. Symbolic reconstruction of Seoul: coexistence of "traditional and global"



Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government (2006: 81), Seoul Selection (2006: 66).

The image and meaning of Seoul have recently been intensively reconstructed, with the aim of improving the global appeal of the city. The symbolic reconstruction of Seoul is based on the idea "that a city should be a place where (historic) experience and consumption coexists in harmony instead of simply being a historic location", which became widespread in the city marketing strategies after 2007 (Kim and Kim, 2011: 197). Two dominant narratives seem to be used often in marketing campaigns and reproduced in various forms and media, in order to get the attention of

domestic and foreign residents, investors or tourists. One narrative focuses on the "royal Seoul", while the other talks about the "breathtaking Seoul" (Seoul Tourism Organization, 2009) (Image 1).[6] The first narrative on "royal Seoul" finds its references in historic palaces and temples, the old city wall and gates, remaining traditional villages, and the landscape surrounding the city. The long and rich cultural tradition of Korea, which the narrative is referring to, makes it possible to distinguish Seoul from other rival cities in East Asia. The "glorious tradition" of "royal Seoul" is used at the same time to legitimize the other dominant narrative on the "breathtaking Seoul", which is presented as being the "ancient capital" and "dynamic and emerging global metropolis" at the same time (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2005b: 103). City marketing in this way tries to relate the image and meaning of what are seen as traditional places to those of the global spectacle in order to construct a distinct yet easily consumable image of Seoul. Recent urban renewal projects in downtown Seoul, such as the Cheonggyecheon restoration, new Gwanghwamun Plaza or Dongdaemun Design Plaza under-construction, are portrayed as a part of the so-called glorious tradition on the one hand, while standing for the ambitions of global Seoul on the other.

Symbolic reconstruction, where so-called tradition is used to legitimize the desired cosmopolitan future, aims to boost tourism development in Seoul. Though sometimes different in form and media, the marketing campaigns promoting the "royal Seoul" and "breathtaking Seoul" use narratives, which praise the city for what is seen as harmonious co-existence of the traditional and global. In this way, city marketing tries to create the distinct image and meaning of Seoul, one that is easily recognizable, marketed and consumed. Combination of such traditional and global references constructs an imaginary representation of a "clean and attractive global Seoul", which has its origins in the rich natural and cultural heritage. In order to study symbolic reconstruction in Seoul its relation to the urban renewal, and some of the consequences that it has on everyday life and tourism development in the city, we want to focus on the Cheonggyecheon restoration.

[6] Two posters, promoting Seoul as an attractive tourism and convention destination, show a traditional Korean landscape painting and old royal palaces surrounded with the places of global spectacle like Cheonggyecheon, Seoul Tower, COEX or Teheranno. The posters read as "A true convention city Seoul, where modernity and tradition exist in harmony" and "Refresh your Soul in Seoul, Experience the excitement of the city where nature, culture and technology flourish". The imaginary representations of the city thus suggest continuity of historic and global places, which is apparently unique to Seoul. In reality, the portrayed places are not that close and the so-called traditional places are rare in the overwhelmingly global city, which in turn seems a rather common characteristic of many East Asian cities.

4. Instrumentalisation of the Cheonggyecheon restoration?

Cheonggyecheon is an eleven-kilometre stream running through downtown Seoul. It played an important environmental and symbolic role when Seoul was established in 1394. Following the Pungsu, traditional Korean knowledge of geomancy, Cheonggyecheon was believed to bring energy to the city and guarantee harmony with nature. The stream used to be one of the most important places in pre-modern Seoul. Although Cheonggyecheon used to be a place of continuous transformations throughout the history, its image and meaning did not significantly change until the rapid industrialization of Seoul in the 1950s (Ryu, 2004). During that period, the stream became an obstacle to the economic growth and urban development of the city. At the same time, the environmental and living conditions deteriorated enormously as the stream became a home to numerous immigrants. Until 1966, almost the entire stream was covered with a road and the elevated Cheonggye Expressway in order to assist the growth of industrial and residential areas in Eastern Seoul (Image 2). When the urban development moved to the southern parts of the city during the 1980s, many places

Image 2. Downtown Seoul in 1969 when Cheonggyecheon was covered by the expressway

Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government (2005a: 149).

along Cheonggyecheon fell into economic decline. Yet at the same time Cheonggyecheon used to be a place of bustling wholesale markets, small workshops and stores, street restaurants and bars, stretching along the expressway to the narrow alleys of nearby neighbourhoods. Because of their good accessibility they attracted thousands of daily workers, merchants, illegal vendors and customers, which created distinct and diverse local places and cultures over the years (Nahm, 2001; Križnik, 2010).

In 2002, the metropolitan government announced an ambitious plan to demolish the ageing Cheonggye Expressway and restore the stream on its site. The restoration was successfully completed in 2005, only two years and three months after it started. Anticipated results of the Cheonggyecheon restoration were multiple. The Seoul Metropolitan Government (2005b) wanted to improve environmental and living conditions in downtown Seoul, resolve disparities in development between the northern and southern part of the city, recover natural and cultural heritage lost during the rapid urbanization, create new public spaces and amenities, increase traffic safety and boost tourism development in the area. Many goals of the restoration have already been achieved in fact. Environmental and living conditions in the area have improved considerably, while residents can enjoy new public spaces and attend a variety of cultural venues and bustling commercial activities (Image 3). The restoration also played an important role in creating new investment opportunities in the northern part of Seoul (Rowe, 2010). At the same time, the Cheonggyecheon restoration also has an important strategic role as an instrument of urban policy by which the metropolitan government tries to improve the economic competitiveness and global appeal of the city. The former Seoul mayor Lee left no doubt about the strategic goals of the restoration, when stating, "once the stream is restored, we want this area to stand out as a center of foreign investment. The ultimate goal is to make Seoul a great city, one that can compete as an attractive center of business with Shanghai, Tokyo and Beijing" (quoted in Kane, 2003). In this sense, the Cheonggyecheon restoration has to be seen not only as an urban renewal project that improves the quality of everyday life and boosts tourism development in Seoul, but also as a "worlding practice", by which the metropolitan government tries to challenge established relations between East Asian cities (Ong, 2011). It is no coincidence that Tokyo and Beijing are the capitals of the countries that are the main markets for the tourism industry in Seoul.

Although the Cheonggyecheon restoration has had a positive effect, in general, on environmental and living conditions in downtown Seoul, its less desirable outcomes became evident recently. It seems that the project was

Image 3. Cheonggyecheon as a new public space and tourist attraction in downtown Seoul

Source: Križnik (2009b: 125).

initially narrowly focused on the restoration of the stream alone and did not provide a long-term plan to address diverse consequences of such large-scale urban renewal (Cho, 2010). Land values in the area significantly increased after the restoration and many neighbourhoods, such as Hwanghak, Wangsimni or Sinseol, become places of land speculation and intensive urban development (Rowe, 2010). Numerous high-rise office and residential projects are currently under way along Cheonggyecheon, often completely out of scale and with no meaningful relation to the places nearby. Such unrestricted urban development not only has a negative impact on the urban landscape, but also significantly changes the existing social structure and economic organization of the area. Namely, private urban development, which directly benefits from the restoration, pays little if any attention to the existing economic and social complexity of the area (Križnik, 2009b).

While certain industrial or service sectors flourish, traditional jobs are in decline. Places that used to play an important role for reproduction of the local economy and everyday life are about to disappear, while many small workshops and shops are closing down their business. There used to be about 60,000 shops, employing more than 800,000 workers and illegal

street vendors along the Cheonggyecheon (Nahm, 2001; Cho, 2010). However, Cheonggyecheon flea market, once one of the largest street markets in Seoul, virtually disappeared after the restoration. The nearby Hwanghak market is facing a similar fate. The metropolitan government was aware of consequences that the restoration might have on the local markets and eventually offered some vendors continuation of their business in the old Dongdaemun Stadium after the restoration started. Nonetheless, the majority of the street vendors had to relocate to other parts of Seoul or lose their work. Yet the Dongdaemun stadium, too, was demolished a few years later and the remaining street vendors had to relocate again. Today there are reportedly about 700 street vendors left in the newly opened Seoul Folk Flea Market, which shows the vast impact of large-scale urban renewal on the local economy. The ongoing gentrification, decline of traditional industrial and service sectors and disappearance of local places and cultures resulting from the loosely controlled private development is at least partly triggered by the Cheonggyecheon restoration. In terms of the consequences it has on local places and cultures, the Cheonggyecheon restoration does not seem to differ significantly neither from urban development of downtown Seoul in the past nor from similar urban renewal projects in other cities (Smith, 2002; Kim and Yoon, 2003).

What differentiates Cheonggyecheon restoration from the past is its instrumental role in improving the economic competitiveness and global appeal of the city. Especially in terms of the effect on the tourism industry in Seoul, the restoration seems to work well. The OECD (2005: 102) study expected that the restoration "can serve as a flagship project showing to the international community Seoul's dedication in building a lively urban landscape. If the project is closely connected to a cultural booming, it could become a major touristic asset for Seoul's international image." After its opening the stream in fact became one of the major tourist attractions in the city and more than 120 million visitors reportedly have visited Cheonggyecheon, with some 20% of them being foreigners (Table 2). Although Cheonggyecheon still lags behind the most popular places like Myeongdong or Dongdaemun, which are visited by more than half of all foreign visitors to Seoul, we have to notice that Myeongdong and Dongdaemun are two of the most important shopping areas in the city. Compared to historic and cultural sites similar to Cheonggyecheon, such as Insadong for example, the number of foreign visitors is rather similar. Due to the growing number of visitors, the Cheonggyecheon restoration has a positive effect on tourism in downtown Seoul and generates new jobs in the area, which was once known for its small industrial workshops and local markets. To

support the tourism development, the metropolitan government designated Cheonggyecheon as a special tourism zone and built facilities like the Cheonggyecheon Museum and Seoul Folk Flea Market nearby the stream. The iconic Dongdaemun Design Plaza, which the metropolitan government expects to become the new icon of global Seoul, also benefits from the transformation triggered by the Cheonggyecheon restoration (Chung, 2009).

Table 2. Foreign visitors to the major tourist attractions in Seoul from 2006 to 2010[7]

	Myeongdong	Dongdaemun	Old palaces	Insadong	Cheonggyecheon
2006	51.4%	48.5%	42.9%	26.6%	12.7%
2007	55.1%	50.3%	47.7%	32.5%	17.7%
2008	52.8%	51.2%	43.7%	33.4%	18.0%
2009	62.5%	53.4%	42.0%	29.4%	17.8%
2010	66.7%	56.4%	44.0%	32.2%	19.8%

Source: Korea Tourism Organization (2007: 107; 2009: 111), Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism (2011: 128).

Urban renewal, such as the Cheonggyecheon restoration, is rarely only a matter of transforming a particular place. It is also about the interpretation of urban renewal and its outcome. Namely, the narratives giving meaning to places influenced by the urban renewal also legitimize its anticipated goals. Dominant social and political actors try to impose in this way their particular interpretation of urban renewal, which sometimes stands in strong contrast to the past or existing meaning of those places. Therefore, symbolic reconstruction of cities is inherently a contested process, where different actors attach opposing meanings to a particular place. Cheonggyecheon restoration is no exception in this sense. However, in the case of Cheonggyecheon, the meaning of the stream was already lost a long time ago, when the stream was covered with a road and elevated highway. Little if any historic references for the Cheonggyecheon restoration actually existed, neither in terms of its image nor meaning. Cho (2010: 151) hence points out that if the stream "was to be restored, it either had to

[7] Monthly survey includes about 8000 foreign visitors to Korea each year. The respondents are asked about the places, which they visit during their stay in Seoul. The daily field survey of the Seoul Metropolitan Facilities Management Corporation confirms the findings about foreign visitors to Cheonggyecheon. According to an interview with a public official there were 17.7 million visitors to Cheonggyecheon in 2010, with about 1.5 million of them being foreigners. Referring to the number of foreign visitors to Seoul in 2010 (Table 1) the public official estimates that about 17% actually visited Cheonggyecheon.

be reinvented or reconstructed in the urban context of global Seoul. This meant that natural Cheonggyecheon was to be discursively created..." In this sense, the naming, too, can be seen as a part of symbolic reconstruction, as there was actually no stream to be restored before the transformation took place.[8]

When the Cheonggyecheon restoration was announced it enjoyed strong public support and favourable media coverage. With broad political support, Mayor Lee favoured a rapid restoration, which he saw as an opportunity to improve the economic competitiveness and global appeal of the city. Metropolitan government officials, civic engineers and governmental research institutions provided the required professional support for his ambitions. At the same time, a rapid and successful restoration process was also expected to demonstrate his management competence and strengthen his political position. The planned restoration of the stream and its interpretation was thus utilized to a great extent to support Mayor Lee's political interests. The contesting actors, consisting mainly of civic, academic, environmental and cultural organizations and local merchant associations, opposed to what they perceived as an undemocratic restoration process, instrumentalised by the metropolitan government. Yet while the merchant associations were trying to protect their private interests, the environmental and cultural organizations struggled for a more democratic restoration process and criticised the lacking "ecological and historical authenticity" of the stream (Cho, 2010: 162).

The interests of the dominant actors eventually prevailed over the concerns of civic society. More than on a careful restoration of natural environment and cultural heritage, the Cheonggyecheon restoration focused on construction of an iconic place of global spectacle which, according to the civic groups, lacks "authentic meaning".[9] At the same time, such approach of the metropolitan government also rewrites the meaning of Cheong-

[8] *Cheonggyecheon reconstruction* seems to be a more appropriate way to describe the actual transformation of the stream. Nonetheless, we use the original name *Cheonggyecheon restoration* for formal reasons because the name was commonly used in recent studies on Seoul.

[9] Rather than for a long-term gradual restoration of the entire Cheonggyecheon water basin and its environment, which could have brought a sufficient natural water inflow, the metropolitan government decided to supply the water by pumping it from a nearby water-treatment facility. Costly water pumping does not seem to have much in common with the supposedly ecological restoration of the stream. Restoration of cultural heritage also drew a lot of criticism. Several historical sites were reportedly partly destroyed during the restoration and the ancient Gwanggyo Bridge was newly reconstructed away from its historic location (Križnik, 2010).

gyecheon and the image of the city. Reports in foreign media, for example, show that restoration successfully challenged the unfavourable international perception of Seoul as an "urban concrete jungle" (Walsh, 2006). The Cheonggyecheon restoration thus not only recovered natural and cultural heritage or improved the quality of everyday life in Seoul, but was also used to re-image the city and sell it as a "clean and attractive global city". While environmental and historic importance of the restoration was well presented to the public, the strategic goals were, on the contrary, hidden behind narratives representing Cheonggyecheon as the "new face of Seoul" and "hope for the Seoul citizens". The Seoul Metropolitan Government (2005b: 105) promoted the restoration as "a greater task that the entire nation is interested in as a symbolic project to revive an important part of Korea's historical and natural heritage at the start of the 21st century". The restoration was portrayed as a project of national importance, which was supposed to get the unconditional support of residents. The dominant narratives about national interests, supposedly related to the restoration, were actually used to legitimize particular economic and political interests of the metropolitan government (Ryu, 2004; Cho, 2010).

Cheonggyecheon was portrayed as a place where the so-called heritage of the ancient Hanseong co-exists with the global Seoul (Image 1). However, not every piece of history fits the desired image and meaning of global Seoul. While the history and cosmopolitan future are used as sources of imagination and representation of things to come, the legacy of industrialization, symbolized by the once heroic and now demolished Cheonggye Expressway, does not fit the desired image of global Seoul. Yang, the then assistant mayor of the Cheonggyecheon Restoration Project Headquarters, clearly stated that by "liquidating the unsightly legacy from Korea's developmental period and restoring the city's natural environment, Seoul can be ready to emerge as a cultural metropolis where tradition and modernity are harmoniously blended with each other" (quoted in Monthly Environment 21, 2004). Many local places and cultures along Cheonggyecheon that once gave rise to the rapid development and prosperity of Seoul were literally deconstructed and forgotten during the restoration process. In this way, the Cheonggyecheon restoration rather strongly affected the symbolic reconstruction of the city. The dominant narratives legitimizing and promoting the restoration not only changed the meaning of the city, but also rewrote its history from a particular view favoured by the metropolitan government.

While the symbolic reconstruction of Seoul resulting from the Cheonggyecheon restoration positively changed perception of the city abroad, it

had less desired consequences on the use and perception of the stream among local residents. In a survey conducted in Wangsimni, a low-income neighbourhood nearby Cheonggyecheon, a rather large number of respondents claimed that they never visited the stream after it was opened to the public.[10] That result is somehow unexpected considering the proximity of the neighbourhood to the stream and the fact that the respondents had complained about the lack of public space in the neighbourhood. 69% of the respondents also claimed that they frequently spend their free time in the neighbourhood. When asked about the reasons for which they did not visit the stream, some respondents explained that they do not perceive Cheonggyecheon as "their place" (Križnik, 2010). It seems they perceived the dominant meaning of Cheonggyecheon as something imposed and radically different from what it used to mean for them in the past. At the same time, the visitors from other parts of Seoul and abroad, for whom the restoration was actually intended, virtually took over the stream. The perception of Cheonggyecheon among the survey respondents was thus not only affected by dominant narratives, but also by the "privileged consumption practices" of other visitors (Centner, 2008).[11] For some local residents, the Cheonggyecheon restoration has thus created a sense of new order, while for others it has resulted in a sense of alienation due to the loss of their living environment. The outcome, as Balibrea (2001: 189) asserts, depends on residents' "previous relationship to the now transformed spaces […] and will also be conditioned by the degree of persuasiveness of the different discourses circulating and giving meaning to the changes". Due to their instrumental role, the dominant narratives interpreting the Cheonggyecheon restoration had largely overlooked or even purposefully ignored the relationship between the stream on the one hand and the local places and culture on the other, which resulted in a negative perception of the restoration among some local residents.

[10] 33% of respondents claimed they had never or seldom visited Cheonggyecheon. When asked about the most important consequence of the Cheonggyecheon restoration, 48% answered that the restoration resulted in a better environment, 40% claimed the same about the new public space, while 6% saw the improved image of the area as the most important consequence of the restoration. However, 6% believed that the Cheonggyecheon restoration is beneficial for the economic development of the neighbourhood (Križnik, 2010: 194).

[11] Centner (2008: 216) points out that priviliged consumption practices are not only a result of a large-scale commodification of space, such as the Cheonggyecheon restoration, but also occur through a "number of personalized, spatialized practices that enact social power" over the everyday use and meaning of space. Visitors to Cheonggyecheon seem to have a different capability to take over the stream, which Centner describes as *spatial capital*, than the local residents.

5. Conclusion: symbolic reconstruction of cities and its contradictions

We have tried to understand the process of symbolic reconstruction of cities and situate it within the context of growing competition among cities, which increasingly influences their urban policy and everyday life. Competitive urban policy assumes that the position of a particular city in the global economy can be improved by efficient management and marketing of its strategic resources, which eventually results in faster economic growth, urban development and better quality of everyday life. Symbolic reconstruction of cities can be seen as an outcome of competitive urban policy, where the existing image or meaning of places is purposely changed to attract new investments, events or tourists. The result is an easily marketed and consumable image or meaning of places. However, symbolic reconstruction of cities is not a formal instrument of urban policy. Rather it is a conceptual framework, which allows us to understand the relation between urban policy on the one hand and urban renewal and city marketing on the other. Namely, the latter two are among the key instruments of competitive urban policy, which are expected to boost tourism development in cities and improve their global appeal.

The paper focuses on the Cheonggyecheon restoration to see how symbolic reconstruction is related to and influenced by competitive urban policy, urban renewal and city marketing in Seoul. The urban renewal of Cheonggyecheon positively influenced downtown Seoul and tourism development in the city. Yet because of its instrumental role in improving the economic competitiveness and global appeal of Seoul, Cheonggyecheon restoration also triggered gentrification, decline of traditional industrial and service sectors and disappearance of local places and cultures. Displacement of traditional flea markets, demolition of low-income neighbourhoods or emerging alienation among the local residents show how local places and cultures were affected and replaced by global spectacle through the urban renewal process. While the Cheonggyecheon restoration in this way shows once more how gentrification became embraced as a "global urban strategy", in Seoul the gentrification was hardly "geographically isolated and in its infancy" as Smith (2002: 440) mistakenly asserted. "Wholesale clearance" based on evictions was, namely, always an integral part of urban renewal in downtown Seoul (Kim and Yoon, 2003: 586). Cheonggyecheon restoration does not significantly depart from that approach in terms of its local consequences.

Where the Cheonggyecheon restoration differs from the past urban renewal in downtown Seoul is the extensive symbolic reconstruction of the city and stream. Cheonggyecheon became one of the major tourists attrac-

tions and the icon of global Seoul. The restoration also played an important part in aggressive city marketing, which challenged the unfavourable international perception of Seoul. The image and meaning of Cheonggyecheon was rewritten from a particular perspective, which praises the city for what is represented as the co-existence of the "traditional and global". In this way, the metropolitan government managed to distinguish Seoul from rival cities in East Asia and attract new tourists to the city. Cheonggyecheon restoration and the resulting symbolic reconstruction seem to have been instrumental in selling global Seoul. The restoration represents a novel and successful approach to "worlding practices" in East Asian cities and considerably departs from the established Western models (Ong, 2011). Yet the resulting symbolic reconstruction of the city also had negative consequences on local places and cultures. The latter could become an important asset for the tourism development of Seoul in the future if they were not displaced or demolished due to the restoration. The negative outcomes of symbolic reconstruction hence contradict the strategic aims of the Cheonggyecheon restoration, which was expected to boost tourism development in the city, and may eventually prevail over the actual benefits of restoration for tourism and everyday life in Seoul.

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Prodaja globalnog Seula: natjecateljska urbana politika i simbolička rekonstrukcija gradova

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Članak se fokusira na proces simboličke rekonstrukcije gradova, gdje se postojeću sliku, odnosno značenje mjesta, namjerno mijenja s ciljem privlačenja novih investicija, događaja ili turista u određeni grad. Proces simboličke rekonstrukcije pokušava se postaviti u kontekst rastućeg natjecanja između gradova. Simbolička rekonstrukcija također utječe na razvoj turizma u gradovima osiguravajući jednostavan marketing i potrošnju slike i značenja mjestâ. Primjer obnove Cheonggyecheona u Seulu pomaže razumijevanju odnosa i utjecaja između simboličke rekonstrukcije gradova i natjecateljske urbane politike, urbane obnove i marketinga grada. Promatrajući lokalne posljedice može se zaključiti da, dok su obnova Cheonggyecheona i simbolička rekonstrukcija grada koja je iz nje proizišla pomogle da Cheonggyecheon postane glavna turistička atrakcija i ikona globalnoga Seula, ujedno su dovele do propadanja lokalnih mjesta i kultura. Takvi rezultati urbane obnove u suprotnosti su sa strateškim ciljevima urbane politike i mogu na kraju prevladati nad prednostima koje obnova Cheonggyecheona donosi za razvoj turizma i svakidašnji život u Seulu.

Ključne riječi: Cheonggyecheon, marketing grada, Seoul, simbolička rekonstrukcija, urbana obnova, urbana politika, razvoj turizma