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## **Hospitality, culture and regeneration: Urban decay, entrepreneurship and the "ruin" bars of Budapest**

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### **Abstract**

This paper considers the relationships between hospitality, culture and urban regeneration through an examination of rom (ruin) venues, which operate in dilapidated buildings in Budapest, Hungary. The paper reviews previous work on culture and urban regeneration in order to locate the role of hospitality within emerging debates. It subsequently interrogates the evolution of the rom phenomenon and demonstrates how, in this context, hospitality thrives because of social and physical decay in urban locations, how operators and entrepreneurs exploit conflicts among various actors involved in regeneration, and how hospitality may be mobilised purposefully in the regeneration process. The paper demonstrates how networked entrepreneurship maintains these operations and how various forms of cultural production are entangled and mobilised in the venues' hospitality propositions.

## Introduction

The relationship between hospitality and urban regeneration has received increasing attention in recent years as writers have begun to recognise the role that hospitality can play in the regeneration process (see Bell, 2007, 2007b). Bell and Binnie (2005, p. 80) suggest that “urban culinary culture can play a paramount role in producing the habitat for ongoing regeneration, and also provide a powerful symbolic statement about urban fortunes.” This echoes earlier observations about the role of cafes, bars and restaurants in the gentrification process (cf., Zukin, 1982, 1995; Mitchell, 2000; Latham, 2003). Hospitality venues become focal points for particular consumer segments often involved in creative activities and cultural industries; subsequently, the symbolic value of individual outlets becomes synonymous with their surrounding milieu. Hospitality venues are thus part of the social and economic processes through which, at least in some cases, urban areas are transformed into gentrified, aestheticised playscapes for an affluent new middle class. Nevertheless, the precise form and workings of the relationship between hospitality, culture and urban regeneration have yet to be detailed. This paper examines their complex, sometimes contradictory entanglement, and considers the interaction between different actors and processes in the transformation of urban spaces. We argue that hospitality operators can thrive within social and physical urban decay; operators may also exploit fractures and conflicts in the planning and regeneration processes; but hospitality provision may also be co-opted into the regeneration process. Moreover, we also demonstrate how culture, cultural artefacts and activities are part of these relationships and “hospitality propositions” (Lugosi, 2009) of operators.

The paper focuses on hospitality venues operating in dilapidated, urban buildings in Budapest, Hungary. These venues, referred to in Hungarian as “romkert” (ruin garden) and “romkocsma” (ruin pub), are established in abandoned residential or office buildings; some have been adapted for all year opening while others operate from the early spring until late autumn. Several have reopened in the same location in subsequent years, although many have moved from one place to another, and the itinerant hospitality topographies of Budapest’s districts have thus been reconfigured annually. We seek to explore the development of the rom phenomenon and to consider the relationship between entrepreneurship and the production of rom venues as particular hospitality spaces, and the relationship between symbolic forms of capital and rom hospitality.

The rom venues and their evolving forms are a cultural phenomenon, linked with creativity and creative production, social and physical urban decay and networked entrepreneurship. The three elements interact to create a particular genre: guerrilla hospitality (see Lugosi and Lugosi, 2008 for an earlier discussion of this phenomenon). Referring to these venues as a “genre” of hospitality helps to challenge existing classifications of venues, such as bar, cafe or restaurant, which are based on a narrow conception of function or operational attribute. Genre implies a form or style which has a number of observable characteristics. While the notion of guerrilla generally refers to ‘irregular conflict by independent or autonomous units’ (Bullock and Trombley, 1999), we use the term to stress the irregularity of the venues’ operation, the deployment of unconventional processes and methods, and the autonomy of managers, who rely on the

mobilisation of private labour and capital rather than the resources of large organisations. Similarly to such social phenomena as guerrilla gardening (Johnson, 2006; Tracey, 2007), guerrilla hospitality involves judgements about urban aesthetics and the rehabilitation of the decaying environments, but decay is also embraced and is inseparable from the hospitality proposition. Occasionally, within the construction of these propositions, urban locations are transformed into spaces of “insurgent citizenship” (Holston, 1999) where dominant social and cultural discourses are challenged, and alternative discourses of civil society are articulated. However, guerrilla hospitality, as manifested in Budapest, is not necessarily illegal or subversive; it is not concerned with opposing authority and these venues are not ideologically charged centres of political resistance. Guerrilla hospitality reflects entrepreneurial cultures that thrive by exploiting their physical and social ecology and by mobilising local networks and resources; operators draw on cultural forms and discourses they consider alternative to mainstream cultures, but the commercial hospitality enterprise is fundamental to their existence. Other “guerrilla” venues have operated using the genre’s conventions; for example, the Hotel Transvaal is a series of unique hotel rooms created by artists and local entrepreneurs in the Transvaal district of Holland, in empty residential houses awaiting demolition (see <http://www.hoteltransvaal.com>). Similarly, the guerrilla boutiques used by the fashion house Comme des Garçons (see <http://www.guerrilla-store.com/>) are located away from fashionable hubs and districts of a city. Comme des Garçons guerrilla stores have been opened (and then closed again after a year) in Reykjavik, Warsaw, Helsinki, Singapore, Stockholm, Athens, Beirut and Glasgow. Like the rom venues of Budapest, these stores mobilise an aesthetic response to urban decay and renewal, as well as setting themselves apart from “traditional” consumption spaces.

As Lugosi and Lugosi (2008) argued, guerrilla hospitality has a number of defining characteristics. Firstly, it is entrepreneurial and opportunistic in flavour and organisation. Its existence relies on the personal investment of the operators who are central to defining its character and who are able to mobilize networks of advocates in developing the operation and the consumer experience. Secondly, guerrilla hospitality requires less formal investment of economic capital than corporately branded and operated venues, and it is less reliant upon formal institutions such as banks for financial support – to that extent, they operate “outside” of formal hospitality systems. Thirdly, guerrilla hospitality may be temporary in its manifestation in a particular space, but then may re-emerge elsewhere. As we demonstrate, Budapest’s rom venues found an ecological niche in which they could thrive, albeit temporarily. The relationship these venues had with the broader forces of regeneration in the various districts of Budapest meant that their existence in any one location was limited by the demolition or redevelopment of those buildings. Fourthly, guerrilla hospitality operations most often occupy buildings that were not hospitality venues previously (although this may not always be the case and it is not a prerequisite). The reuse of unusual premises adds to the novelty and appeal of the venues: it becomes a part of their unique selling point and distinguishes them from other operators in the hospitality market. Finally, guerrilla hospitality draws on alternative forms of symbolic capital for its appeal and existence, in which inversions define the quality and value of space and place. The deployment of the ruin aesthetic in particular enables rom operators to leverage a particular form of (sub)cultural capital which, although arguably

now globalized and thereby to some extent banalized (Williams, 2005), nevertheless embodies a particular commentary on and relationship to processes of regeneration and postindustrial urbanism. In Budapest, this is inflected by the particular histories of postsocialist urbanism, too (see Bodnár, 2001; Kovács, 1994; Sykora, 2005).

The rom venues of Budapest and guerrilla hospitality can thus be argued to represent the production of a symbolic form. Scott (2001, p. 12) defines symbolic forms as “goods and services that have some emotional or intellectual (i.e. aesthetic or semiotic) content.” He goes on to argue that:

commodified symbolic forms are products of capitalist enterprise that cater to demands for goods and services that serve as instruments of entertainment, communication, self-cultivation (however conceived), ornamentation, social positionality, and so on, and they exist in both ‘pure’ distillations, as exemplified by film or music, or in combination with more utilitarian functions, as exemplified by furniture and clothing. (Scott, 2001, p. 12)

It is useful to think about the rom venues and guerrilla hospitality as a symbolic form for several reasons. Firstly, doing so blurs the distinction between hospitality as a commercial enterprise and hospitality as a cultural activity or cultural phenomenon. Furthermore, some of the defining characteristics of rom venues and guerrilla hospitality (the relationship between art and intelligentsia) emphasise the multiple meanings of culture – both as a system of values, norms and codes shared by a social group, and culture as a series of creative processes or products. Secondly, conceptualising guerrilla hospitality as a commodified symbolic form helps to explain how its various features have re-emerged in subsequent generations of venues, which have borrowed from the aesthetic and entrepreneurial models developed by earlier pioneering venues. In this paper, rom venues are revealed to function in this way, as key sites of cultural production and consumption, as well as venues to eat, drink and socialise.

### **Urban regeneration, culture and hospitality**

As already noted, the relationship between hospitality and urban regeneration is an emerging research subject (Bell, 2007a; 2007b). An area that has received greater attention is the relationship between regeneration and culture, which has tended to focus on narrowly defined cultural institutions (such as art galleries and museums), bracketing off other consumption spaces from direct consideration. However, rather than treating hospitality in isolation from other cultural activities, it is useful to consider the provision and consumption of hospitality as itself a form of cultural activity. This blurring of boundaries between hospitality and culture is particularly important here for a number of reasons. Firstly, the view that hospitality can be reduced to the provision of food, drink and shelter has come under increasing criticism (Lashley *et al.*, 2007; Lugosi, 2008, 2009). Food and drink may be provided with minimal or no provider-customer interaction, although the consumer experience is often assured because of extensive interactions between staff and customers and between consumers. Consequently, interactions within a hospitality context may become entangled with the production and consumption of

cultural goods, services and experiences. Secondly, hospitality venues frequently utilise cultural artefacts and activities in the venue's servicescape and the consumption experience – from displays of art work to musical performances. Thirdly, hospitality venues may exist to provide a service to workers or consumers who are involved in cultural production and consumption. Venues thus become part of the broader "creative ecology" or milieu of a particular neighbourhood – vital sites where socializing and networking occur (Banks *et al.*, 2003). Hospitality entrepreneurs may also be thought of as engaging in a broader "socio-cultural project" very much aligned to notions of culture-driven regeneration (see e.g. Latham, 2003, p. 1717). However, it is important to stress that the relationship between hospitality operators and regeneration may take a number of forms ranging from active engagement in urban transformation to commercial opportunism, where engagement is limited to maintaining or utilising ecological features needed to sustain the venture.

Evans (2005) has examined in greater detail the potential relationship between culture and regeneration, and proposed three scenarios: culture-led regeneration, cultural regeneration and a third relationship, which he calls culture and regeneration. Within culture-led regeneration, "cultural activity is seen as the catalyst and engine of regeneration—epithets of change and movement. The activity is likely to have a high public profile and frequently to be cited as the sign or symbol of regeneration" (Evans, 2005, p. 968). Within cultural regeneration, "cultural activity is more integrated into an area strategy alongside other activities in the environmental, social and economic sphere" (*ibid.*). In a third scenario, cultural activities may not be formally planned or developed as part of the regeneration process. Indeed, Evans suggests that cultural activities may develop in response to a lack of provision within a formal regeneration plan. However, he notes that "the lack of discernible cultural activity or provision within a regeneration scheme does not necessarily mean that cultural activity is absent, only that it is not being promoted (or recognised) as part of the [regeneration] process" (Evans, 2005, p. 968-969). It is important to stress that the culture and regeneration "model" does not account for the context-specific nature of the relationships between the agencies that promote, perpetuate or regulate hospitality venues and their propositions. We argue, through this case study, that the relationship between hospitality, culture and regeneration can shift between coexistence, cooperation and conflict. Examining the emergence of the rom phenomenon thus helps to identify how different agencies and agents interact and the various processes and outcomes of those interactions. Finally, it is also worth stressing that within Evans' (2005) conception of culture, heritage, tourism and consumption activities are seen as ancillary activities to culture or cultural production. In contrast we position commercial hospitality operations and their

(cultural) propositions as particular spaces that provide the context in which the various agencies interact. Moreover, we suggest that beyond contexts, hospitality venues are also outcomes or cultural products that both reflect and shape different relationships between culture and regeneration. In short, we aim to show the centrality of hospitality to processes of regeneration.

## **The study**

### **Methods**

The data for this paper was gathered through participant observation, internet based literature review and semi-structured interviews. Informal visits to Budapest's hospitality venues started in 1999, but formal participant observation began during a previous study of entrepreneurship, organisational culture and tour guiding in Budapest (Lugosi and Bray, 2008). Beyond the context of this previous study, the venues were visited repeatedly during 2002-2008 on an informal basis. Participant observation was open, unfocused and, as Adler and Alder (1998) argued, could draw on a range of sensory information to gain a general impression of the venues.

Participant observation was complemented by a review of representations of the venues in printed and electronic media between 2001 and 2009. The representations can be categorised into one of three types: firstly, formal, journalistic pieces written about the venues and the debates surrounding their operation. These pieces often included interviews with operators and government officials and mainly appeared in Hungarian language newspapers and magazines. Secondly, Hungarian language cultural magazines and listings pages, which provided periodic summaries of seasonal openings, often accompanied by short, subjective reviews from journalists and other professional/semi-professional cultural commentators. Thirdly, informal commentary, mostly by consumers but occasionally by operators, on English and Hungarian language blogs, subject based discussion groups and website comments pages (see Watson *et al.*, 2008 for further discussion of this type of "netnographic" observational strategy). This third source complemented the first two by providing insights about mundane consumption experiences in venues.

The final method of data gathering was semi-structured interviews with eight owner/managers, identified through purposive sampling (Patton, 2002). Between them, the eight individuals have been partly responsible for the operation of 15 venues in Budapest. That number rises even higher if it includes those venues that have reopened under the same name in different locations. Two of the individuals were part of teams that operated the longest running and most established venues, Szimpla Kert and Szoda Udvar, which in various guises have reopened in several locations in the city. These operators have also opened further venues in Budapest as well as in Berlin. The remaining six have been part of teams that opened a number of venues between 1997 and 2009, some of which have moved and others that closed during this period. These venues were prominent in media representations of the rom phenomenon and the city's

bar scene.

The interviews focused, among other things, on the owners' personal and professional motivations, the history of the venues, the clientele, including changes in consumer profile, relationships with stakeholders, operational challenges, perceptions of the rom phenomenon and their expectations for the future. With the exception of one, the interviews were conducted in Hungarian. The interviews were translated and transcribed simultaneously by the bilingual author who conducted them. Several sections of the interviews were reread and listened to by a second, native speaking Hungarian author and relevant corrections were made to the transcripts.

### Context

The majority of the rom venues operated in the VII district of Budapest, with a few in the surrounding VI, VIII and IX, so, for lack of space, the majority of our discussion of context focuses on this district. However, as a general picture, according to Hegedüs and Tosics (1994, p. 40) this inner area of Budapest, which in their study incorporated the V-IX districts, is characterised by low quality housing, the value of which is compensated for by its good location in the heart of Budapest. In the VII district, 89 per cent of the housing stock was constructed before 1919; only 10 per cent of buildings were built between the two world wars and only 1 per cent originates from the socialist period (Földi, 2006). Following World War Two, damaged buildings were pulled down and the resulting lots largely left vacant or used for car parking (Földi, 2006). The general deterioration of buildings was coupled with a declining population, in this and the neighbouring VI and VIII districts until 2001 (Földi, 2006; Tosics, 2006), although more recently the population in the three districts has grown by over 20 percent (Kovács *et al.*, 2007). According to Földi (2006, p.223), the socio-demographic characteristics of VII district have four general features: an aging population, with a high rate of elderly widows; lowering social status compared to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; decreasing Jewish and increasing Roma population; and no marked segregation of different residents. Reflecting a familiar pattern of gentrification, the recent growth of the population in the VII district has seen a shift in the socio-demographic profile with the arrival of "young people, artists, students and independent expatriates...renting or even buying flats for a relatively low price" (Keresztély, 2007, p.107), a growing number of higher educated people, childless young couples and a reduction in the proportion of unemployed, lower status residents (Csanádi *et al.*, 2006).

Regeneration in the VII and VI districts has been led by the private sector, often on market rather than public-private partnership (PPP) terms, with a strong emphasis on speculation. There has been the absence of a singular local governmental strategy; indeed, the local government has limited opportunities for intervention because of the high degree of privatisation and the resulting ownership structure (Földi, 2006). There is also a strong presence of civil organisations, which have opposed specific initiatives (Földi, 2006; Keresztély, 2007; Kovács *et al.*, 2007). This context means that the regeneration "story" that has unfolded in this area is markedly different from that proceeding in state or PPP dominated districts, where transformation has been more radical and comprehensive (See Földi, 2006). The fragmentation of ownership and

governance has led to numerous conflicts and subsequent fractures in the regeneration process, which has established the ecological niches into which rom venues have developed.

The increasing rent- and value-gap in the VII and neighbouring districts (Hegedüs and Tosics, 1994) has led to tensions between residential and commercial use (Tosics, 2006). Investors, developers and the municipality may be keen to engage in more radical transformation, but many of the buildings in the VII district are distinctive and have been given protected heritage status (Földi, 2006; Amichay, 2004). These tensions between urban decay, valued and protected heritage and private investment are important in establishing the context for the development of rom venues and guerrilla hospitality. In particular, we highlight how conflicts between different interests have enabled operators to establish venues, how venues have been displaced as a result of investment and development, and how hospitality has on occasion been co-opted into the rehabilitation of an area. This helps to explain the rom genre's development, while examining the nature of entrepreneurial activity and mobilisation of various forms of capital by the operators helps to appreciate how these venues are transformed into hospitable spaces.

### **The history of the rom venues**

The initial manifestation of rom hospitality emerged in 2002 with the opening of the Szimpla kert. The original Szimpla was an indoor cafe, which opened in 2001 and was patronised, in part at least, by people involved in new media, art, journalism, writing and design. The Szimpla's owners wanted to open an outdoor venue for the summer season and found an abandoned residential building in the VII district. According to one of the bars' operators, Attila, the ambiguous nature of this initial venture resulted in the municipality renting the building, for a nominal cost, as a storage space.

The building was made up of several floors of apartments which were located around an inner courtyard. The courtyard is a familiar built form in Budapest, often dating from the late nineteenth century (see Bodnár, 2001), and it is also a specific architectural feature which led to the development of the rom kert as a particular genre of hospitality. The apartments and walkways were barricaded off, and to create the venue the inner courtyard was furnished with a makeshift bar, lampions and an assortment of chairs and tables. This building, like many that came to house rom venues, was in a residential area, but the courtyard offered a large, open air space, surrounded by the building, which largely contained the revellers and the noise.

Customers entered the crumbling building's courtyard through the car park of an adjacent building. Attila claimed one of the most significant operating costs was not the lease of the actual building, but guaranteeing access to it: "We had to buy parking spaces – 10 spaces, like we had 10 cars all parked in a line, so people could come in." He also noted that Szimpla kert eventually moved, not because of issues with the building itself, but because the car park was redeveloped, preventing access to the courtyard. The establishment of the Szimpla highlights the role of the material environment in creating the setting for guerrilla hospitality, but also how operators found, and exploited, the



ecological niche in which this genre could evolve.

In 2003 two more venues opened in the streets surrounding the Szimpla kert: the Gozsdu and Szoda Udvar (Soda court), which was the brand extension of an indoor bar, Szoda, operating in the VII district. Emulating the Szimpla kert, the Gozsdu and Szoda Udvar both opened in courtyards of abandoned residential buildings. The summer 2004 season represents the most significant growth stage in the rom phenomenon, with a new generation of venues opening in the VII as well as other neighbouring districts (Földes, 2004; Földes *et al.*, 2004). The Szoda Udvar and Szimpla kert, which had both moved premises once, were joined in the VII district by Mumus, Tethely and Kuplung, plus the Szimpla kiskert (small garden) in the VI district. These bars were all within a few hundred metres of each other in the residential area. Another important and long established operator, West Balkan, which had previously been an outdoor venue in Buda, relocated to the VIII district and opened as a kert in a disused ruin awaiting demolition.

The 2005 season was a more turbulent time for rom venues in the VII district. The noise generated by the venues' patrons attracted complaints and the mayoral office of the VII district did not lease premises to several of the venues that had opened in the previous year. Numerous operators attempted to resist closure by claiming they were actually cultural institutions rather than merely bars (Dudás and Földes, 2005; Munkácsy, 2005). Kuplung and Szimpla kert continued to operate in 2005, consciously positioning themselves as cultural institutes by organising cultural events, exhibitions and concerts; Szimpla also has a cinema. Another aspect of Szimpla kert's survival was that the Kazinczy Utca building was privately owned and not rented from the municipality. However, the Szimpla kert's future remained insecure: the local authorities imposed a midnight closing time and threatened to shut the venue (Munkácsy, 2005). The Szimpla's owners subsequently mobilised their customers and local residents to sign a petition in support of the venue (*ibid.*).

In 2005 the Tűzraktár (fire warehouse) opened in a disused medical supplies building in the IX district (since renamed Tűzraktér (fire store space) following a number of changes in its management). The Tűzraktár emulated the design features of the earlier rom venues and similar art-centric projects in Europe (see <http://tuzrakter.hu/mi.html>): it was an overt attempt to develop a cultural centre and to bring hospitality together with formal art and culture. As well as having the usual features of rom venues such as the bar space and table football, the venue hosted fashion shows, literature evenings, concerts, theatre shows and provided work space for artists alongside exhibiting their work in the empty rooms in the building. The diverse cultural functions of the Tűzraktár/Tűzraktér were also evident in the West Balkan, which eventually relocated in 2006 to another venue in the VIII district, following the demolition of the previous building as part of the district's regeneration programme (see [corvinpromenade.com](http://corvinpromenade.com) for details). Szoda Udvar reopened in another venue during 2005-6, but the Szoda's owners did not open a courtyard in 2007.

2007 was another evolutionary phase in the development of Budapest's broader bar scene, which emerged, in part at least, from the rom phenomenon. The Szoda's owners

collaborated with the operator of another venue, Sark, to open the Corvintet?, which sits on the top two floors of a department store in Pest. In Buda, a terrace bar, Fecske, opened on the roof of a swimming pool. The Corvintet? and Fecske continue to incorporate the features of the guerrilla hospitality proposition: both occupy and reuse unusual and somewhat dishevelled spaces, and both venues are decorated with graffiti and other art. This occupation of terraces was extended further in 2008 by the opening of the Kópé Terrace on top of a department store built in the 1980s. 2008 and 2009 also saw the emergence of several new courtyard and kert venues opening in the VI and VII districts, all of which perpetuate the characteristics of preceding rom venues.

The occupation of abandoned residential and industrial premises is a not a new or unique phenomenon; nor is the central role of artistic and creative activities in transforming these spaces (see e.g. Groth and Corijn, 2005). However, it is problematic to reduce the rom phenomenon to being a simplistic imitation of analogous socio-cultural projects in other postindustrial cities. Instead it is useful to consider the contextual factors and agencies that have led to the emergence of this phenomenon. These include such non-human actors as the courtyards as specific architectural configurations of Budapest that offered the possibility for specific manifestations of hospitality, alongside such human ones as the reporters, cultural commentators and bloggers who have defined rom as a distinct cultural phenomenon (see e.g. Földes, 2003; Pál, 2003 for examples of cultural commentaries; see also Lugosi and Erdélyi, 2009 for further discussion of the interaction of human and non-human actors in the emergence of rom phenomenon). The various municipalities also had key roles in allowing some venues to operate while sanctioning others. Official attitudes towards the rom venues varied, although it is problematic to argue that some districts were more welcoming of venues than others. Instead it is more useful to consider how specific venues carved out their ecological niche and continued to thrive. In the remaining parts of this paper we focus on the entrepreneurs and their interactions with other local and nonlocal actors, which transformed decaying urban fabric into hospitable spaces. Moreover, we examine how cultural, artistic and creative activities are entangled in the production of these urban spaces. We begin by examining the interaction between the various forces and agencies of regeneration and the rom phenomenon.

### **Urban regeneration and rom hospitality**

The evolution of rom phenomenon reveals a complex set of relationships and tensions with broader forces of regeneration in Budapest. The two initial generations of rom venue operated within a fracture in the urban planning and regeneration process, when existing occupants had been dislocated but the processes of urban transformation had yet to take full effect. The underpinning forces of regeneration and gentrification – low quality housing, with a growing rent and value gap (Hegedüs and Tosics, 1994), decaying urban fabric with an ageing, lower status population, shrinking in size (Földi, 2006) and decreasing state ownership and influence (Kovács, 1994) – created the spaces for the emergence of this particular genre of hospitality. In short, the transformation of Budapest has created countless “loose spaces” (Franck and Stevens, 2007) or “dead zones” (Doron, 2000). In these in-between spaces, the planning and regeneration process is

stalled or is at a lull, but the buildings do not remain empty. As Doron (2000, p. 253) writes, “empty shells have been transformed, outside the dominant economic system, into workshops, studios and recreation rooms. These meaningless architectural structures have been diversified into galleries, theatres, concert halls and clubs, outside the established art and cultural institutions”. And in many instances, the ruined nature of the buildings is turned into an aesthetic feature, playfully commenting on urban decay (and also on the “purifying” processes of regeneration which are not far behind). While the serial reproduction of the “industrial ruin” as cultural institution means that the radical edge of this commentary may be lost, perhaps most notably in the industrial warehouse gallery space (Williams, 2005), Edensor (2005) comments that such ruins are often teeming with alternative forms of public life and creative reuse. From squats to raves, gig spaces to social centres, disused urban buildings have been reappropriated and repurposed, though they are precarious and subject to reabsorption into the urban order (Chatterton, 2002; Groth and Corijn, 2005). Nevertheless, a new mode of urban cultural entrepreneurship, often equally interstitial, can be observed colonizing these spaces.

In some cases the occupation of loose spaces or dead zones may be conceptualised as ideologically driven, politicised expressions of insurgent citizenship or urbanism (cf., Holston, 1999; Groth and Corijn, 2005). However, when considering the rom venues, occupation may also be considered as the outcome of opportunistic entrepreneurialism, which thrives by exploiting conflicts surrounding planning and regeneration. The Gozsdu offers an example of this: it operated in one part of a large building complex named the Gozsdu Udvar, which was built in the early 20th century by a Romanian born lawyer (and the ownership of the Gozsdu Udvar has been contested throughout the last century by Hungarian and Romanian authorities). The rehabilitation of the Gozsdu Udvar complex was delayed partly by arguments about ownership but also because of disagreements about the nature and character of the rehabilitation process – a fairly common part of the regeneration “story” in the city (Bodnár, 2001; Sykora, 2005). Added to this was the almost legendary resistance by one particular resident of the Gozsdu complex: a dentist, who refused to vacate his premises and so allow demolition and reconstruction to begin (Földes, 2003; Szabo, 2003).

Other conflicts surrounding the urban fabric, which influenced the nature and form of regeneration, concerned the protected heritage status assigned to a number of buildings. As Attila noted, “The building [in which the Szimpla kert is located] became a “m?emlék” [protected heritage monument]. So it is not so easy to pull down – to demolish the building. The owner knows this. We are here and we pay a lot of money.” In this sense, the rom operators have been able to exploit the hiatus in regeneration, legitimised through the production of revenue for building owners. One of the West Balkan’s operators, Gy?z?, noted that similar factors provided them with the space to set up a venue:

*The problem with this is that this area is worthless to them. It is in their possession, but they cannot demolish the houses and build new residential premises because this and that [he points to the two buildings] are protected monuments. [...] He is going to give this back to the municipality, in return for another street.*

Allowing these hospitality venues to operate thus enables private owners to capitalise on their investment in situations where other, more comprehensive transformation of spaces would encounter legal and political obstruction. However, West Balkan's ongoing relationship with the private developer involved in the VIII district's regeneration also points to the other ways that rom hospitality is entangled in the regeneration process. According to Gy?z?, the developer came to them and said: "we should stay here until the building is demolished, and we don't even have to pay rent, because this district has a really shit reputation. Them [the developer] building here and us being here and bringing in lots of young people was worth it for them." West Balkan relocated twice in the district, but the relationship between them and the developer continued, and in its current manifestation, the venue has a clear cultural function in the area's redevelopment. In addition to providing a hospitality venue and their ambitions to establish a gallery, concert space and educational facilities, West Balkan was required, under the terms of their "functional" agreement, to build and operate a playground. This is one example, where rom venues perform mixed functions that blur the boundaries of hospitality and culture, and at the same time stress their role as beacons of the transformation of areas with previously dubious reputations.

These examples highlight different relationships between hospitality venues, their operators and the agencies of regeneration. The dynamics of material and social urban decay created the spaces in which these bars could operate, while the conflicts surrounding the planning and regeneration process allowed these venues to thrive. However, it is also important to note that the processes of regeneration have at times limited the existence of these venues as buildings were reclaimed and their potential value re-capitalised. Within the remainder of this paper we interrogate further the different relationships and organisational arrangements that enabled the hospitality venues to exist.

### **Networked entrepreneurship and hospitable spaces**

The forms of guerrilla hospitality emerging through the rom venues reflect common themes highlighted in the literature on entrepreneurship and small enterprises (cf., Kirby, 2003; Thomas, 1998; Morrison *et al.*, 1999): the visions and values of the founders are usually central to shaping the organisation, with owner-managers at the centre of decision making – relying on intuition, improvisation, innovation, experimentation and personal relationships. The rom venues' operators often invested considerable personal time and effort into the design and rebuilding of the physical space; and in many cases they were directly involved in the venue's management. As one of the Fecske's operators noted:

*We were working two months on it. [...] Pretty much we were making it by ourselves. Some friends came, painting, making the wooden floors. I am not [just] the owner who hires some guys to sell some beer. We were building it together. So it was a much better atmosphere in the staff. All the guests see – [staff] pushing each other and making jokes. If [someone] comes to the bar it's not a bartender with a tie, and "Hello sir, what can I do for you?" They just say "Hey, Paul, care for a*

beer?”

These comments point to the ways in which the owner’s involvement shaped the venue’s hospitality propositions, and how the approach to creating and running the bar has produced a particular kind of experience for both workers and consumers. Other operators stressed how their tastes influenced the look and feel of their venues:

*We want this place to be the way we imagine it, so we have to be here – our experience tells us that. We always make the places so that we feel good in them. We really do spend a lot of time here. If there were Coca-Cola seats or Metaxa seats, we wouldn’t feel as good as we do on this sofa [points to sofa in bar]. [...] Each piece of furniture is ours. It would have been easier, and not only would we not have had to spend money, we would have got paid if we didn’t use our furniture, but used Coca-Cola furniture instead.*

(Peter, operator of Szoda and Corvintet?)

The operators have a clear understanding of how the aesthetic of the venues makes a statement about the values of those who work and drink there: while accepting help from the corporate world might have made things “easier”, it would jar with the co-created image of the venue, sending the wrong message. The operators are clearly aware of transnational symbols of commodified culture and how their propositions of hospitality contrast them. The operator’s statement also helps to stress the independent nature of guerrilla hospitality in developing propositions that balance the necessities of commercial enterprise with the desire to mobilise credible, alternative forms of subcultural capital. Discussion of entrepreneurial experiences also points to the struggle that personal involvement entailed. As one of the T?zraktér’s operators explained:

*There were a lot of things to do at the same time... organise programmes, negotiate, sort things out and solve problems. There was no finance, basically we started from zero so everybody performed for free, everybody came for free, people came so they could work there. We had to organise from day-to-day so we would have the technical equipment, so we would have a sound engineer, so we did this absolutely through contacts. [...] One night we had to phone round two hours before the programme because there was something missing. [...] There is a serious network which we always rely on. [...] When a person is doing something “off their own backs” totally as a social activity, then everything, down to the microphone we needed to get free. Looking back I don’t know how we succeeded. I remember phoning in the afternoon and by the evening concert before opening – from zero microphone, 12 microphones were brought here as support.*

The owner-operators frequently mobilised their personal contacts and networks in developing the venues and their associated activities, and that willingness to help out marked a particular moral economy within the venues’ milieu (Banks, 2006). In the T?zraktér, this included the architecture team from *Bercsényi* technical college, who “surveyed the building and told [them] what was ruinous and what needed to be demolished”; while in the Szoda this extended to the design: “the Manga [artwork on the

walls], that was a friend, a good friend, who got into this in Japan and who does design...this is [his] creation.” The design features of the Fecske also highlight the informal transactions of hospitality entangled in the mobilisation of networks:

*We know the guys who made the logos and all the website. Pretty much one guy made them. We actually never pay to them. We said you can drink whatever you want. It turned out they can drink a lot! We stopped it after a while - we can say it's ok, they can say it's ok. It was kind of a deal. They are nice guys - we've know them for a couple of years. They made a good job. But since we are not paying them we cannot say “come on, you said it will be ready yesterday.”*

The bar operators could thus engage in informal transactions with the broader local milieu, connecting together different activities and redefining their value. In this way, a “convivial ecology” could develop, outside of formal contracts and financial arrangements (Shorthose, 2004). It is also important to highlight that the operators who participated in the study all stressed that the venues were financed through private capital rather than investment from formal financial institutions such as banks, larger corporate investors or licensed venue operators. This financing is also reflected in the gradual, evolutionary nature of development in many of these venues. For example, this was Gy?z?'s response to the question of how much they invested in building West Balkan:

*I don't want to talk about specific numbers, because if the reader reads 100,000,000 they'll think “wow they are rich”. [He laughs] On a daily basis we only have money for Párizsi [a cheap processed sausage] and bread rolls - for about the last 10 years - because all our money is tied up in this. In the meantime we have projects that make you go “Jesus”. I am not crying because we are in something really good; it is really exciting and we do survive, but it mirrors something different if I say sums like that.*

As Groth and Corijn (2005) explore in their study of temporary reuse of “indeterminate” spaces, there are broader notions of entrepreneurship at work here, too – for example in terms of mobilising support for campaigns against eviction and closure, or interventions in the planning process. So while phenomena like the rom bars might be dismissed as opportunistic economic utilisation of underused but “trendy” urban fabric, and the exploitation of lull periods in the regeneration process, the broader role of operators (and consumers) in debates about urban culture and city living reinforces a reading of the rom bars as “socio-cultural projects” (Latham, 2003, p. 1717) not reducible merely to the calculative exchange relations used to characterize commercial hospitality:

*This was a demolished building, like that one [he points to a nearby ruin]. We agreed to build a playground here... from the dust. We financed this from the large West Balkan... from our own capital, with our architect partner... we always design things ourselves, so luckily we don't have these outgoings. What we usually do is the three of us sit down for an entire day, we come up with the ideas and Gábor draws the technical drawings. We planned for half a year. These were our plans and this was from our capital. And we had to then give this over to the municipality.*

*[...] We tried to get the old VIII district things - use corrugated iron and this faux stone for the exterior, which they used at the turn of the century, which was poured all at once. If you go into lots of the buildings here in the VIII district, a lot of them didn't have tiles or stones, but a single poured stone, with patterns. They are beautiful. There are only two people in Hungary who still work with this technique. (Gy?z?, West Balkan)*

A similar theme emerged in descriptions of the T?zraktér's activities and functions, which was an overt attempt to perpetuate and emulate discourses of civil society:

*We opened with a programme: 2008 was the year of "dialogue between cultures", we were part of that and we were also part of the Anna Lindh [foundation], which also had a programme called the "cross-talk evenings", and the building of mutual acceptance through communication and dialogue. And the "art against discrimination" title...[pause]...we thought we would bring artists together and open with something that reaches out internationally and is, at the same time, a social and simultaneously an artistic endeavour, because for a few of us this was very present and something we felt we could respond to artistically - and was important.*

In the quotes above, the entrepreneurial "flavour" of the rom operators is outlined, with a clear and shared understanding of what the venues contribute to the city and its culture, and with shared modes of operating – the "guerrilla" ethos of a do-it-yourself approach. Self-consciously positioning themselves within debates about art and commerce, hospitality and regeneration, the rom operators embody (and seek to replicate in every aspect of their venues) a particular attitude towards the notion of hospitable space. The commentary on the T?zraktér's aims also connects this emergence of guerrilla hospitality with a broader set of international networks and agencies of cultural production, which helps to legitimise the venue's proposition, while providing a supporting infrastructure that enables these propositions to be realised.

### **Entanglements of culture and hospitality**

*The culture cannot sustain itself; this is true to this day: the hospitality has to sustain the culture. (Ágnes, T?zraktér)*

Ágnes' forthright statement about the T?zraktér's existence highlights the central role of hospitality in cultural provision. It also helps to stress the limitations of viewing hospitality as either a marginal cultural activity or an ancillary service (cf. Scott, 2001; Evans, 2005). Interviews with rom operators repeatedly highlighted how hospitality provision was entangled with cultural activities. Ágnes also made it clear that the initial T?zraktér in the IX district failed because the hospitality operators did not play their part – either in providing a quality commercial proposition or by contributing to the overall project financially. In contrast, West Balkan's prosperity was directly attributed to its ability to provide the commercial hospitality enterprise, while utilising culture to enhance its proposition. West Balkan provided an office, exhibition and work spaces for several cultural organisations. Hospitality remained the principal source of income; but the

cultural organisations provided something which could not be achieved with the provision of food or drink alone:

*Providing culture in terms of operation runs at a loss. But the value it adds, advertising value, worked very well for us [at the previous venue]. There was the contemporary [art] gallery, the Bioton sound studios, the TÁP theatre and we appeared in lots of places with these things. There is a feeling that cannot be expressed through advertising. The TÁP theatre worked [like this] – we arranged that there would be one performance a week. We paid them for that on a weekly basis. We gave them a place for free, even the rehearsal space, and the office space. They brought a show, which, yes, we paid a fee for, but this also appeared on the income side, and people came for that. We could promote that really well and a lot of people came for the TÁP theatre. The performance paid for about an eighth of the costs, and the profits went to the theatre. That was a loss for us, but it was worth it because there was a crowd here on a Monday. [...] Anyone who came in would say “Jesus this place is doing well.” This has its value - it’s not an dead, empty venue.*

The operation of cultural capital within urban neighbourhoods has attracted recent academic attention (Bridge, 2006). Cultural capital refers in part to abstract knowledge and competencies, but also to embodied, material and institutional manifestations, which reflect and transmit knowledge and competencies, most notably about taste (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is built up and also deployed in taste-based negotiations of status, demarcating an “in group” with good taste from others who lack it. In our study, the mobilisation of cultural capital was evident in the construction and reproduction of the rom genre. Creativity (and art in particular) frequently re-emerges in the design and operational policies of subsequent generations of bars, and was used to mark the distinctiveness of the venues:

*People come to us and we sit down with them. If they have an event that’s good and fits into the picture, then yes. Cycle couriers have a competition – the “Alley cat”, this was the finish for them a few times and the after race event. We had fashion shows, exhibitions and book launches, ping pong competitions, rodeo competitions. These were organised by others.*

The operators share an understanding of things that “fit into the picture”, bolstering the cultural capital of rom users by reaffirming their taste culture. Rom venues have in the past hosted intellectual debates, book launches, exhibitions, fashion shows with local art college students, and musical concerts – particularly jazz or blues and electronic music. These activities represent alternative discourses to mainstream, popular culture, and show the deployment of subcultural capital in an attempt to define a cultural niche. Not all the venues have the same musical policies or are equally keen to champion art; nevertheless, all of the venues discussed here incorporated one or more such cultural activities as graffiti, poetry extracts, sculptures, paintings and collages into their decoration. The mobilisation of these cultural artefacts and activities also highlights that



owners are clearly aware of the fruitful synergies between arts and hospitality that can be achieved relatively easily. These synergies are in themselves cultural, in the sense that they help define the genre of hospitality on offer, thereby attracting a certain type of clientele. The sustained synthesis of 'mundane transactions of hospitality' (Lugosi, 2008) with art and cultural production has also resulted in the prosperity of specific venues: legitimising their status as cultural institutions has avoided sanctions from the municipality. The dense imbrications of art and commerce here reinforce our argument that hospitality should be thought of as a central, rather than merely supporting, element of Evans' (2005) culture and regeneration scenario.

## **Conclusion**

Previous work has shown that hospitality plays a significant role among networks of cultural entrepreneurs and creative individuals that have established communities in numerous run-down city districts around the world (Zukin, 1982; Lloyd's 2006). While bars and cafes have often been characterised as "ancillary" services to the creative or cultural sector (e.g. Scott, 2001; Evans, 2005), examining Budapest's rom venues has shown that they perform much more than a supporting role: venues become cultural focal points and attractions in their own right. It may therefore be useful to consider how hospitality venues in other contexts may act both as symbolic focal points for members of the creative industries *and* as centres of creative output. Bars do not just provide food, drink and meeting places for cultural producers and consumers, but are significant reservoirs of cultural capital.

An examination of the rom phenomenon, alongside previous work on hospitality, culture and regeneration, enables us to identify three potential manifestations of hospitality, which may occupy different positions within the regeneration process and the various stages of urban change. Within the first type, hospitality venues operate both as hubs and centres of output for those involved in the sectors. The presence of the venues and their clientele in a city district may be a catalyst for a process of gentrification and regeneration, although investment may be small scale, disorganised, entrepreneurial and the nature of urban transformation is incremental (Zukin, 1982). In the second type, hospitality is an overt part of the gentrification process, and the developers work with operators to open venues that reinforce discourses of conviviality in a city district, which in turn reflects the dramatic process of urban change (Bell and Binnie, 2005). Investment is likely to be intensive and involve a number of agencies, including local authorities and private investors. A third type, which is reflected in Budapest's rom phenomenon (and other examples of guerrilla hospitality elsewhere), operates between these two extremes. It may continue to reflect the entrepreneurial flavour of the first scenario, and it may also share a more ambiguous relationship with regeneration. In mobilising various forms of capital, it may contribute to an ongoing process of regeneration or gentrification, but it exploits the unevenness in regeneration rather than being a formal part of it. Moreover, investment may still be small scale and driven by a network of individuals or smaller agencies rather than government bodies, large private investors and developers. Within the three scenarios, hospitality interacts in complex ways with diverse manifestations of culture. Cultural artefacts and cultural production help to mobilise consumer segments

and may become points of reference in the articulation of individual and collective identity; cultural activities may be used within the marketing of venues; and the symbolic and material aspects of culture may also be used in the creation of hospitality spaces and consequently in the shaping of the consumer experience.

The examination of the rom phenomenon highlights the complex relationships between hospitality, culture and urban space, which operate at various scales. The guerrilla hospitality of rom venues self-consciously connects the micro-spaces of the venues with the urban fabric of the districts in which they are located. The hospitality propositions within these venues are intimately and dialectically linked with the surrounding urban milieu. This case thus points to the need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the built landscape, discourses of city living, and the operational policies of hospitality venues that thrive in particular urban locations. The Budapest case also stresses the need to extend the study of hospitality and notions of the "hospitable city" (Bell, 2007a, 2007b) through a critical appraisal of how cultural, material and social forces and agencies interact to produce hybrid forms of hospitality. This reflects and adds weight to the growing calls for research on hospitality to consider how broader sets of factors interact to form hospitality spaces and hospitable experiences (Lashley et al., 2007; Lugosi, 2008, 2009). Finally, recognising the central role of particular kinds of hospitality venue in the broader creative ecologies of cities, the paper suggests the need to bring together conceptual tools from hospitality studies with those of urban geography, in order to explore the complexity of the relationship between hospitality and regeneration. The rom bars provide a different "story" about culture and regeneration, while reinforcing the need to study urban entrepreneurialism as an intervention into processes of urban change. As debates about the "creative class" and the "creative city" show few signs of abating in either policy or academic circles, so researchers must look at once more closely and more widely at the interplay of commercial hospitality, creative/cultural production and consumption, and urban transformation.

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