8. Gentrification: Local (Urban) Image Development Instrument while Carrying Out Cultural/Creative Tourism

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Historical centres of cities play an extremely important role in the tourism industry. Visitors' knowledge of a city often begins and ends in its historical centre. The financial benefit of tourism often promotes preservation of the material historical urban environment and its distinction. In cases when a city chooses promotion of tourism as the basis of development, several threats emerge. When only the material urban environment and tourism infrastructure are developed with no regard to the residents and their needs, a city can become a negative museum object.
In Lithuanian historical cities, tourism was developed both during the Soviet years and after the restoration of independence.
After the restoration of independence (1990), historical Lithuanian cities, especially Vilnius, have been attracting more and more foreign tourists. The city attracts cultural tourists rather than mass tourists; therefore, there is no severely negative impact so far. However, the financial benefit of tourism promotes increasingly more extensive commercialisation of the centre and its becoming a consumption zone. Goals of economic and tourism development encourage cities to become exceptionally attractive trademarks; however, due to the international glass architecture tendencies and skyscrapers in almost all geographical planes, cities become similar instead of becoming exceptional. The process of social change in historical urban centres is called gentrification and is evaluated differently depending on the cultural context. For example, gentrification in cities in the U.S. is used as a means to improve the quality and economy of the physical environment of declining historical centres and districts. This process is accepted and widely used in historical urban district in the U.S. The social change in SoHo, New York, is seen as a classical example of gentrification. In Lithuanian urban centres and historical districts, the process of gentrification can be observed as well. For instance, Krupickaitė and Standl (2004) studied the signs of this process in Užupis. The study reveals that there is a similar social change to that in Western countries. There are also the following differences: according to the scholars, local image has improved significantly in Užupis but not the physical state of buildings. In the Western world, gentrification is usually related to the improvement of the physical state of historical environment. A portion of unique historical suburbs of Lithuanian cities have either not yet been touched by social change or are undergoing radical transformations. The engine of gentrification is the uniqueness of a historical district.