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TWENTY YEARS AFTER SOCIALISM: THE TRANSFORMATION OF PRAGUE'S INNER STRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT. The cities of Central and East Europe have by now passed through 20 years of democracy and market economy. The new political, economic and societal climate brought a revival of urban processes which had been interrupted by forty years of socialism. The article discusses the relevancy of the post-socialist city concept. We search for specific aspects of development of cities influenced by socialism taking the example of urban processes, which have been changing the inner spatial structure of Prague. Globalization, new technology and new forms of work and mobility have similar impacts on urban development on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. However we argue that other aspects, such as the inherited physical and social structure of the socialist city as well as the institutional context of post-socialism, have resulted in a specific form of urban processes, at least during the transformation era, in the majority of European post-socialist countries. Although similar key urban processes are forming the spatial patterns of post-socialist and western cities, they often have different causes, dynamics and consequences in the two contexts.

Keywords: Prague; post-socialist city; urban (transformation) processes; inner structure

Introduction

The shift from a communist to a democratic political regime and from a centrally planned to a market economy represents the pivotal change in the political and economic transition in Central and East European cities. Internationalization and globalization also leave their mark on the development of post-socialist cities. The post-socialist society and space are today more influenced by economic mechanisms, while the role of state and administrative decisions has greatly diminished. Although much is still due to the legacies of historical development, contemporary dynamics are significantly transforming the structure and organization of post-socialist cities. The overlap of socio-economic patterns inherited from socialism and the new influences and dynamics produce here specific conditions for urban development, that are distinct from

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processes encountered in Western cities. Although similar key urban processes are forming spatial patterns of post-socialist and western cities, their causes, dynamics and consequences often differ between the two contexts.

As suggested by Enyedi (1998), the combination of local political and economic transition, delayed shift from the industrial to the post-industrial city, and the general transformation of the global economy creates unique conditions of urban development in Central and Eastern Europe. The features of socio-economic processes in post-socialist cities vary as a consequence of different transformation policies, historical legacies and levels of social and economic development in each country (Dostál and Hampl, 1994; Enyedi, 1996; 1998; Kovács, 1999; Musil, 1993; Musil and Ryšavý, 1983; Weclawowicz, 1992). Such is the case of former East German cities, where the country's re-unification created peculiar conditions of urban transformation (Cochrane and Jonas, 1999; Herfert, 2006). Eastern Germany and the western part of Czechoslovakia had developed quite similarly to the West during the last century. Prague was the heart of the most industrialized part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century, and the general character of concentration and deconcentration processes was relatively similar in Prague and other Western European cities even under the communist regime. The Czech capital grew mostly due to spatial stretching and the development of new residential areas on the urban edge. Similar deconcentration processes were typical also for other western European cities (van den Berg et al., 1982), many of which were significantly influenced by welfare state policies supporting social housing (Weclawowicz, 1992). During the post-war era mainly suburban areas have been developed on both Eastern and Western sides of the Iron Curtain.

While the location of new housing was fairly similar, we can identify several crucial differences in the post-war development of cities under socialist and welfare state cities. The first and most visible one is the variability of housing construction within suburban zones in Western Europe compared to the homogeneity of new developments in socialist cities. The social heterogeneity of housing estates was specific to socialist countries and distinguished them from social housing in Western Europe. Other differences include i) very limited development in the other areas of the city, with minimum investment in the reconstruction of the existing housing stock in the central and inner parts; and ii) zero development around the compact city (except housing estates), so that suburbanisation was an unknown process in socialist countries.

Since the political change, post-socialist cities have been undergoing the formation of new socio-spatial differentiation (Enyedi, 1998; Häussermann and Kapphan, 2005; Ouředníček, 2006; Ruoppila and Kährrik, 2003). While the core of the cities are historically structured environments, other parts of metropolitan regions are developing according to various scenarios during the post-socialist

transformation. In the case of Prague, the two zones which created the pre-war Greater Prague (centre and inner city) today have a similar face to comparable cities in Germany or Austria. The central and inner city neighbourhoods could easily return to their pre-war development trajectories since there are now no major differences in their physical structure compared to other western European cities. The social structure of the population has also been slowly transforming to pre-war conditions. On the other hand the urban zones built under socialism, especially housing estate areas, have no parallel in Western European cities and represent the main common feature of all post-socialist cities (Stanilov, 2007). The physical and social structure of the outer city and the rest of the Prague metropolitan region are today mixed areas of the survivals of socialism and new suburban development. This paper offers an overview of the socio-spatial differentiation and the main urban processes in Prague, which are discussed separately for each of the four concentric zones of Prague.

General development and inner structure of the city

Under the socialist regime, the dominant position of the state in the economy, housing system, and planning shaped the development of cities. Perhaps the most significant divergence in urban development between Western cities and Prague occurred during the first decade of communist rule. While Western cities followed the pre-war processes of urbanization and suburbanization, the communists' effort to balance the development of the urban system halted the dynamic population concentration and spatial expansion of Prague. It shifted the allocation of investment, jobs, housing construction and other functions to other cities (Musil, 1991). More recently, the regulation of population growth has disappeared, but the consequences of the restriction of immigration enforced in the 1950s are still obvious now, particularly in the age composition of Prague (Graph 2). Certain "underurbanization" (Szelényi, 1996) and the hidden potential of growth in Prague can be traced when comparing the concentration of residential and working functions. While the concentration of population was regulated to a high degree by housing and labour policy, the allocation of jobs was much more influenced by the attractiveness of the capital city (Dostál and Hampl, 1994). During the 1970s and 1980s a strong preference was shown for the major urban centres, particularly to the capital cities, which represented the cores of national settlement systems and the main development areas (Enyedi, 1998; Musil and Ryšavý, 1983). The housing system in former socialist countries was based on state ownership, publicly controlled distribution and centrally planned production, which diminished the operation of market mechanisms in housing (Clapham, 1995; Kovács, 1999). Socialist state housing policy favoured investment in prefabricated high-rise housing estates in peripheral areas of cities, while the inner city residential areas were left to decay (Enyedi, 1998).

Suburbanization in the form of single family housing did not take place in the socialist cities, as building activity in the periphery was concentrated in large high-density housing estates (Häussermann and Kapphan, 2005; Musil, 2005a; Ouředníček, 2007).

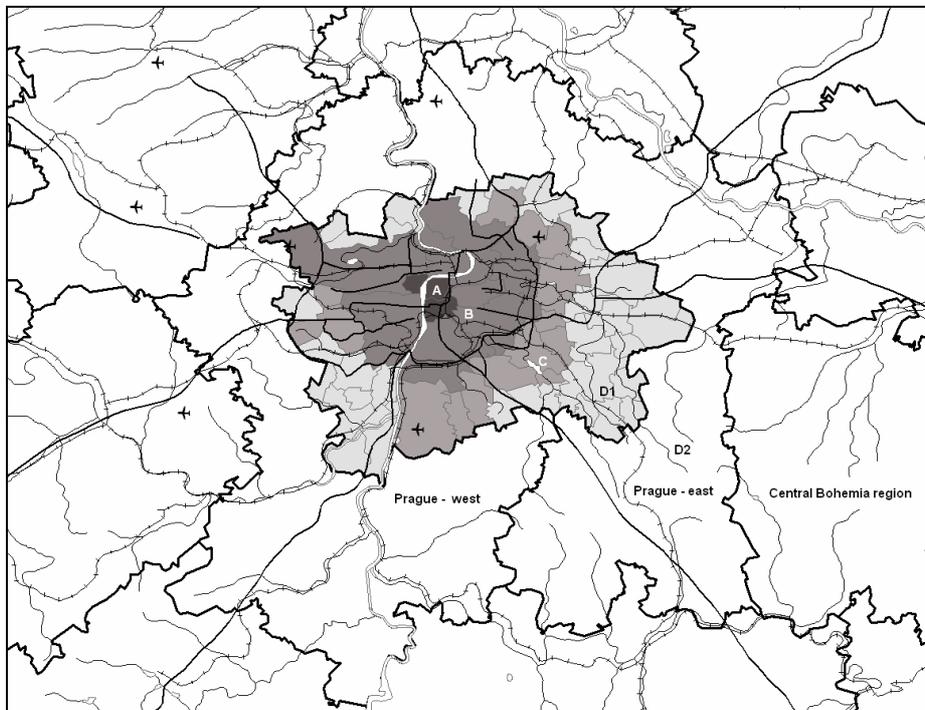
While urban development depended on the redistribution of the central budget under state socialism, today the economy (companies, entrepreneurs, and households) is the principal agent, and local governments and civil organizations, the main coordinators (Drozg, 2004; Enyedi, 1998). Land rent was not a significant factor in urban development in socialist countries as rents were very low and did not depend on location or quality (Kemper, 1998; Sailer-Fliege, 1999). The reestablishment of private ownership and real estate market tremendously influenced the internal spatial structure and urban landscape of post-socialist cities (Häussermann and Kapphan, 2005; Illner and Andrlé, 1994; Kovács, 1999). Location in post-socialist cities regained an economic value which brought a re-evaluation of many areas and produced new patterns of land use, especially in the most attractive locations. Moreover, the housing sector in Central and East European countries underwent the decentralization of state responsibility to the local government, the privatization of housing stock, a decline in new housing construction, and a restructuring of housing supply (Baross and Struyk, 1993; Clapham, 1995; Pichler-Milanovich, 1994). The new socio-spatial patterns have been primarily formed by the increasingly selective mobility of the population with various residential preferences, and a growing differentiation of housing supply (besides the vertical mobility of people).

Alongside visible, symbolic changes, such as the removal of communist signs and the changing of names of streets, squares, bridges and metro stations (Kaltenberg-Kwiatkowska, 2008) – the character of the social environment also started to change. The social stratification of Prague society gradually changed during 1990s. Privatisation processes, the development of entrepreneurship, and even the grey economy, gave rise to a new group of rich people. On the other hand, unemployed and homeless people, prostitutes and beggars, are an inherent part of the contemporary social milieu of the city. Prague opened its gates to foreigners from the Western world as well as to workers from the East, which, together with increasing tourism, have made it a multicultural city. The social inequalities and socio-spatial polarization in cities have thus been growing rapidly during the post-socialist transition (Enyedi, 1998; Kovács, 1999).

Zones of Prague

Prague could generally be divided into four concentric zones which correspond to the periods of historical development of the city. The historical centre is formed by the medieval city built during the Charles the IVth era. The inner city developed during the industrial/capitalist period in the time of Greater

Prague¹. The outer city of housing estates was established under state communism. Newly developed settlements within the metropolitan area constitute the hinterland of Prague. Table 1 sums up the main characteristics of the four zones (the hinterland is divided into two zones, inside and outside the capital's boundaries). The Prague metropolitan area is made up of the administrative districts of the Capital of Prague and the two adjacent districts of Prague-east and Prague-west (Graph 1). Altogether it has a population of 1.38 million in an area of 1,666 square kilometres. The territory of the metropolitan area is divided into the 57 city districts and 171 municipalities in surrounding districts, all of them self-governed.

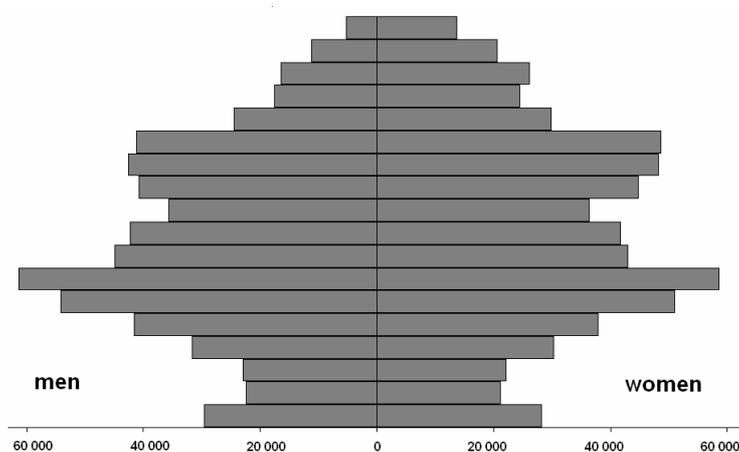


Note: A = Historical centre; B = Inner city; C = Outer city; D1 = Hinterland (city parts within the administrative boundaries of Prague); D2 = Hinterland (administrative districts of Prague-west and Prague-east)

Graph 1. The division of Prague metropolitan area into four zones

¹ Greater Prague was established in 1920 and was made up of the newly adjoined towns and villages in the agglomeration of Prague. This delimitation persisted until the 1960s, and then two large extensions were approved in 1968 and 1974.

The demographic structure of Prague's population is today characterized by a high percentage of economically active people, further supported by foreign and domestic migrants mainly of productive age. However, demographic aging with a regressive age composition and the substantial generations of post-war parents and their 1970s children represents one of the worries of the capital's future (Graph 2). The strong demographic differentiation typical for socialist cities has been replaced with a relatively homogenous age structure of individual zones of Prague (Table 2).



Graph 2. Age composition of Prague in 2007 (5 year categories)

Source: Czech statistical office (2008).

The evolution of the population of Prague's four zones is described in Table 3. The increase/decrease in the population is influenced mainly by migration. The population of Prague is relatively stable as many people bought co-operative or municipal apartments during the privatization in the 1990s. New construction mainly involves commercial projects for higher-income groups. Prague's poorer inhabitants remain partially excluded from the housing market. On the other hand, thanks to wide-ranging social assistance and surviving rent regulations², there is no great pressure to leave larger, more attractive and more expensive apartments for economic reasons. Residents of lower socio-economic status are thus only being pushed out from the attractive residential areas very slowly, although inevitably.

² For example 36% of households live in regulated rental houses (only 19% in the whole Czech Republic; Living Conditions, 2008).

The most intensive processes shaping contemporary Prague include suburbanization, international migration, and revitalization. These processes support, to a large extent, the growing social differentiation of Prague's neighbourhoods. Their main impacts are visible in the target places of this mobility: i) in the suburban zone of Prague, the migration destination of higher and middle status residents, where a few "hamlets" of foreigners have also emerged; ii) in attractive residential quarters within the central and inner city, where gentrification of yuppies (often foreigners) and increasing concentrations of students and singles are typical features³; iii) in housing estates representing zones in transition and the entry gates for foreign workers from Eastern Europe and Asia.

Table 1.

Basic characteristics of Prague metropolitan region zones in 2005

zone	Name	number of city parts (municipalities)	population (2005)	area	density
A	historical core	2	80369	10	8268
B	inner city	9	670264	163	4104
C	outer city	14	326988	115	2841
D1	hinterland a	32	98470	208	473
	Prague total	57	1176091	496	2370
D2	hinterland b	171	199534	1170	171
PMR	Prague Metropolitan Region	228	1375625	1666	826

Source: Statistical bulletin of Prague 2005, Pohyb obyvatelstva v ČR 2005

Table 2.

Age structure of Prague metropolitan region zones in 2008

		Share of people by age (2008)		
Zone	Name	0-14	15-59	65 and more
A	historical core	10.5	73.0	16.5
B	inner city	11.4	69.8	18.8
C	outer city	12.9	77.0	10.1
D1	hinterland a	14.9	72.9	12.2
	Prague total	12.1	72.3	15.6
D2	hinterland b	16.5	70.9	12.6
PMR	Prague Metropolitan Region	12.8	72.1	15.1

Source: Population censuses 1991, 2001; Czech statistical office 2009

³ Around one hundred thousand university students live in Prague.

Table 3.

**Natural, migration and total increase of population within Prague metropolitan region's zones in 1995, 2000 and 2005
(all numbers per 1000 inhabitants)**

	natural increase	net migration	total increase	natural increase	net migration	total increase	natural increase	net migration	total increase
	1995			2000			2005		
historical core (A)	-10.00	-17.59	-27.58	-7.50	-12.65	-20.16	-3.53	-8.71	-12.24
inner city (B)	-6.99	-0.30	-7.29	-5.44	-2.72	-8.16	-2.65	7.81	5.16
outer city (C)	1.57	10.58	12.15	1.46	0.37	1.82	3.32	10.99	14.31
hinterland a (D1)	-2.88	8.29	5.42	-0.32	13.05	12.74	2.51	36.96	39.46
Prague total	-4.71	1.74	-2.97	-3.35	-1.48	-4.84	-0.62	10.01	9.39
hinterland b (D2)	-4.51	5.18	0.68	-2.35	20.41	18.06	2.06	38.91	40.97

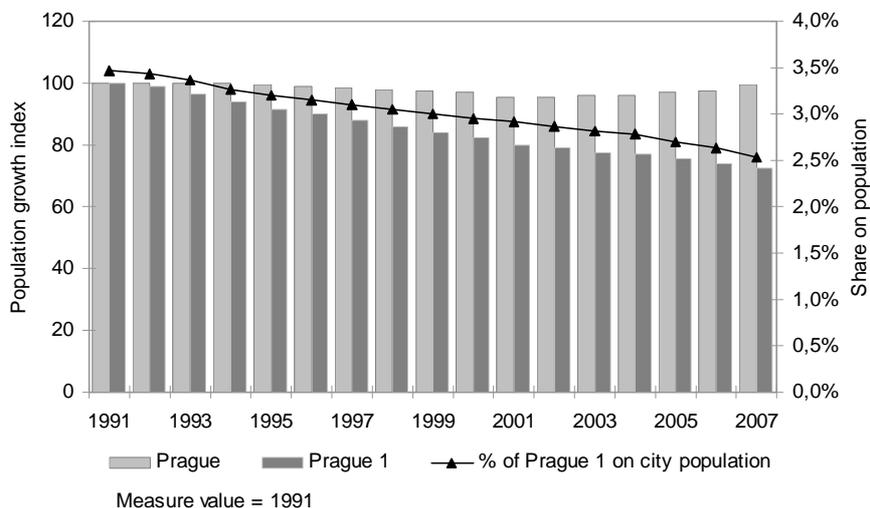
Source: Statistical bulletin of Prague (1995, 2000, 2005), Pohyb obyvatelstva v ČR (1995, 2000, 2005)

Historical centre

After 1990 the capitals of Central and Eastern Europe became the focus of a growing interest in real estate investments, as a result of their thriving economy. (Berry and McGreal, 1995). There was pressure to maximise the economic utilization of space especially in the most attractive city locations. The historical cores of many post-socialist cities have thus experienced a dramatic transformation since the fall of the socialist regime. The revitalization and expansion of central business districts has been spectacular (Enyedi, 1998; Kotus, 2006). With the increasing attractiveness of the city core there was a battle for space between various functions as well as between social groups. Economic activities able to generate higher profits pushed out less competitive functions from the urban locations most in demand, so that office and retail uses have replaced housing and warehousing in many of the post-socialist city centres (Kovács, 1999; Sailer-Fliege, 1999).

After 1989 the neglected historical core of Prague became a prime location for progressive economic activities (consultancy, real estate, law and financial services, luxury boutiques), a prestige residential address for high-income households, and a popular tourist destination. The influx of international visitors to the historic city of Prague brought both positively and negatively perceived changes, including a cosmopolitan atmosphere, transformation of the built environment, pressure on land-use, erosion of the place identity, street congestion (Simpson, 1999). The internationalization of the city centre manifests not only in the growing number of international tourists, but also in the presence of foreign companies and immigrants. The renovation and the construction of

new commercial spaces has been forcing out manufacturing, warehousing, and low-cost housing from the central areas, as the new office and retail uses provide more economically effective utilisation of land and buildings. The prime role of Prague's centre thus shifted from a relatively significant residential function to the concentration of economic activities, contacts, control and command functions, a position common to the cores of major West European capitals (Castells, 1993; Dostál and Hampl, 1994; Sassen, 1995). On the one hand, the huge inflow of commercial investment facilitated the physical and economic revitalization of the dingy city centre; on the other hand, however, it led to rather negative consequences, including population decline, traffic overload, and conflict with the historical heritage bodies. The demise of the city centre's residential function was a major concern during the 1990s and compelled the local government to regulate a minimum proportion of residence in the historical core. Both long term natural decreases and losses through migration lie behind the decline in the resident population (Graph 3). While city centre population had been aging, presently Prague's core has become a sought-after residential destination for young singles, childless couples, and foreigners. The traditionally high social status of the city centre has been further strengthened during the post-socialist transformation thanks to the inflow of university educated residents. There is a significant difference however between the night and day populations of the city centre. Despite the decline of its residential function, Prague's historical core day-time population consisting of workers, students, tourists, and other visitors and is on the rise. (Pospíšilová, 2007).



Graph 3. Population development in Prague and in the centre of Prague since 1991

Source: Czech Statistical Office, 2008.

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Inner city

Under socialism, the central and inner parts of cities in CEE countries declined in economic, physical, and social terms (Enyedi, 1998; Musil, 2005b). New political and economic conditions, however, created opportunities for the revitalization of neglected urban zones and neighbourhoods, particularly in proximity to the city centre, which offered good potential for commercial or residential development. Despite a general similarity of the major revitalization processes in post-socialist and western cities, their causes, dynamics, and consequences differ. In Western Europe urban revitalization often relies on strong involvement of the public sector, entrepreneurial urban governance, targeted urban policies and public private partnerships. In post-socialist cities, the real power and scope of public authorities (particularly local self-governments) in guiding revitalization remains much weaker, often together with tight local budgets, restrictions imposed by private land ownership, protracted bargaining processes, and the lack of experience and expertise (Badyina and Golubchikov, 2005; Feldman, 2000; Keivani et al., 2001; Sailer-Fliege, 1999).

Urban revitalization displays varied patterns for neighbourhoods located in different parts of the inner city of Prague. Although some elements of revitalization have been apparent in almost every inner city area since 1989, the process has been most intense in several locations which offered promising development potential. The high property prices, spatial stress, and dense traffic in the commercially overloaded city centre prompted the revitalization of some inner city neighbourhoods. New office, shopping, and residential projects developed on brown field sites in former industrial neighbourhoods, led to the formation of new secondary centres in Prague (e.g. Smíchov, Karlín) (Graph 4). Local revitalization is mainly a private-sector driven process, where foreign companies hold the pivotal role. Public authorities lack fiscal capacity and strategy for development, while the new development projects require capital-intensive investments (Temelová, 2007). In the dynamically developing new centres, the combination of changes in land uses, physical structure, and urban morphology created new urban landscapes marked by modern architecture and progressive economic activities (Ilík and Ouředníček, 2007; Temelová and Novák, 2007). Alongside functional change and physical upgrading, rising socio-economic status has been apparent in many neighbourhoods experiencing revitalization. At the same time, however, fragmentation and polarization between low- and high-profit economic functions and low- and high-income social groups often marks the area around the revitalizing node (Polívka, 2007; Temelová and Novák, 2007). Although there are no real ghettos or segregated communities in Prague, abandoned properties, low-profile economic activities, and socially disadvantaged populations indicate the stagnation of unattractive localities.



Graph 4. Brownfield regeneration in Karlín and Smíchov in the inner city of Prague

Photos: Jan Škorpil, Jana Temelová

Residential revitalization in Prague is a gradual process. The 'slash and build' renewal (Johnston et al., 2000) known from American and also some West European cities, resulting in dramatic physical modifications and forced relocation of the population, is not the case in post-socialist cities. Gentrification can be seen to a rather limited extent in some traditionally popular inner city neighbourhoods, with old housing stock, in Central and Eastern European capitals (Bernt and Holm, 2005; Hrychová, 2000; Rebernik, 2004; Sailer-Fliege, 1999). In Prague, this process has led to physical upgrading, population change, and social status growth. The role of foreigners is particularly important, both as developers investing in the rehabilitation of neglected housing stock, as well as occupants of luxurious flats. Although the social costs of revitalization are generally moderate, it is apparent that the presence, in one neighbourhood, of social groups with distinct life styles and needs, can lead to conflicts in the local arena. The arrival of foreigners and high-income newcomers to a revitalizing neighbourhood can clash with the lifestyles and everyday needs of other groups, such as the socially disadvantaged or the elderly. Although Prague has not acquired a large culturally distinct population through immigration, the arrival of foreigners and new cultures is evident in the display of international signs, the sound of foreign languages in the public space, and the presence of ethnic restaurants and shops.

Outer city

The outer city is the zone with the most visible impacts of the socialist past in the majority of European post-socialist cities (Parysek, 2004). Prague's outer city is almost a synonym for residential quarters of housing estates. More than 40% of the capital's inhabitants live in one of Prague's 54 housing estates built under the Communist Party's 'Complex Housing Construction Programme',⁴

⁴ Similar share of population in housing estates is also in other post-socialist cities (Tosics, 2004, Dimitrovska Andrews, 2005).

The construction of housing estates stopped in 1993, and the responsibility for finding housing was completely handed over to individuals. The introduction of the mortgage market during the second half of the 1990s provided a certain impetus for housing development, but it also encouraged the outflow of the more affluent people from housing estates to the suburbs (Ouředníček, 2007).

In the early 1990s, as the former Czech president Václav Havel called housing estates “rabbit hutches,” the media forecasted their rapid deterioration or even demolition. Indeed, the housing estates of most post-socialist cities are particularly endangered by physical degradation, and the outflow of the more educated and wealthier people. Prague’s housing market lacks sufficient supply of flats, and the prices of apartments have climbed significantly in residential areas of all types, including housing estates. Thus, a standardized apartment on a Prague housing estate costs approximately 2.8 million Czech crowns, which is more than 100 times the average monthly salary in the Czech Republic. Today, new smaller residential projects are slowly filling the empty areas of Prague’s outskirts, previously adjoined to the city to this aim. While quite different from socialist constructions in terms of the technology and equipment used to build them, as well as in price, the new housing estates are very similar to the older surrounding panel houses (see Graph 5).



Graph 5. Typical twelve-storied block of flats on the Novodvorská housing estate, and new condominiums from the late 1990s (Velká Skála).

Photos: Martin Ouředníček

The growing ethnic heterogeneity of the population is a relatively new phenomenon in post-communist cities. The spatial distribution of foreigners and ethnic groups within the city is quite uneven, with concentrations of Vietnamese, Chinese, and Roma people on housing estates, while westerners are more visible in the city centre and the suburbs (Drbohlav et al., 2007;

Uherek, 2003). Vietnamese street markets, a Russian village on a housing estate in the South West Town, growing ethnic heterogeneity in elementary schools, and the inflow of Roma people to some housing estates (compare with Ladányi, 1993 for Budapest) are among the new characteristics of the ethnic composition of Prague's outer city.

Demographic homogeneity and social heterogeneity of the population were the typical characteristics of Czech housing estates (Musil, 1993). The quota system of communist housing policy favoured young families with children and thus shaped the age structure of housing estates into two-generation communities. On the contrary, the socio-economic composition of housing estates was a mosaic of different professions and social statuses. While selective migration has gradually sifted and sorted inhabitants according to social status and economic power in the transformation era (Tosics, 2004), the demographic structure of housing estates remained almost unchanged. Demographic aging is one of the most discussed problems, especially with regard to the oldest generation of housing estates. Built during the 1950s and the 1960s, they are in least demand, as they present small apartments and construction faults. These quarters are inhabited mainly by pensioners with low purchasing power, fact that determines specific demands of social facilities, shops, and services. Demographic aging and the concentration of ethnic communities are, in our opinion, the two main threats to the future development of housing estates built during the communist era.

The mono-functional residential use of housing estates has undergone considerable changes during the twenty years of democracy and capitalism. Immediately after the Velvet Revolution tiny shops and services colonised public spaces (compare with Cochrane and Jonas, 1999 for Berlin) and the ground floors of panel houses. Police stations, physicians, groceries, small boutiques, and various other enterprises have squeezed into former apartments and storerooms in many housing estates. Higher-level services including restaurants, cinemas, senior citizens' homes and hospitals emerged in various places on the housing estates, replacing local boiler houses, crèches, or kindergartens. In the near future we expect the division of Prague's housing estates into two categories depending on the general quality of housing (Maier, 1997). Stabilization of the population with minor changes in socio-economic status is most probable in housing estates well served by transportation infrastructure and services (compare with Mládek et al., 1998 for Bratislava). Housing estates with smaller apartments, in dilapidated physical condition, and with a poor quality of living environment are the most endangered urban residential areas - not only in Prague, but in other post-socialist cities as well (Kovács, 1999; Sailer-Fliege, 1999; Szelényi, 1996).

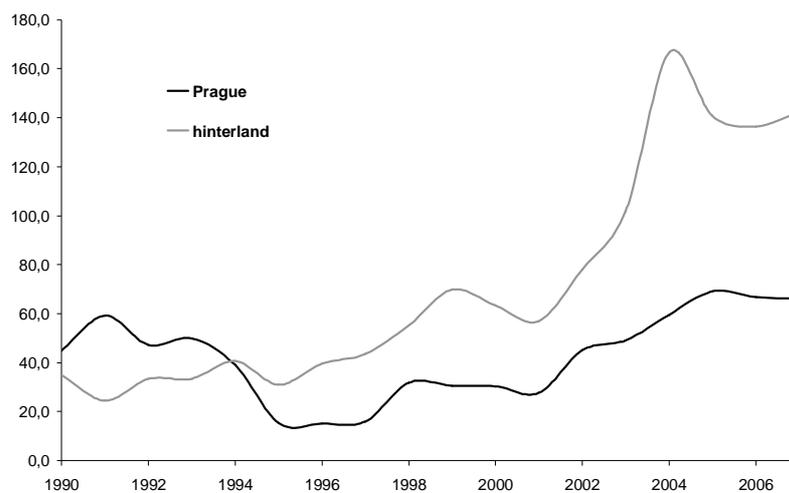
Hinterland

Despite specific exceptions (Herfert, 2006), suburbanization is a common feature of large post-socialist cities in Central and Eastern Europe (Drozg, 2004; Kährlik and Tammaru, 2008; Ouředníček, 2003; 2007; Reberik, 2004; Sedláková, 2005). Selective migration to new residential districts in suburban zones brings substantial changes in the municipalities adjacent to large cities. During the last twenty years, the Prague metropolitan region became the epicentre of suburban development in the Czech Republic. Its suburban municipalities gained thousands of people annually, during this period. Under communism, small and medium sized municipalities were highly neglected and discriminated against in favour of medium sized cities. By the end of the socialist period, elderly people with low socio-economic status formed the predominant population of the outskirts of many post-socialist cities (Herfert, 2006; Kährlik and Tammaru, 2008; Ouředníček, 2007; Timár and Váradi, 2001). Then new suburban construction attracted thousands of young and well-off people. Social polarisation, the demand for new kinds of infrastructure, and changing demographic behaviour and life styles are among the crucial consequences resulting from the suburbanisation process.

Today the city periphery and many municipalities of the wider metropolitan region of Prague are among the most progressively developing areas in the Czech Republic. Yet the intensity of suburban development in post-socialist cities is relatively low in comparison with the suburbanisation boom of Western Europe in the 20th century. The development of new residential areas around Prague is scattered among many municipalities. The construction of tens of new houses adjacent a former village, using the existing infrastructure and facilities, is the typical form of new residential expansion. Residential suburbanisation started immediately after the Velvet Revolution in areas located close to the city or even within Prague's administrative boundaries. Migration to the suburban zone is still increasing annually and new housing construction is sprawling out to more distant and less attractive locations across the metropolitan region. The inflow of young people influences the age structure and demographic behaviour of the population within the suburban zone, resulting in migration and a natural increase of the suburban population (see Table 3).

Suburbanisation has both negative and positive impacts on the source and target localities of suburban migration. While slowly declining housing estates cope with the out-flow of the younger and economically stronger population, suburban municipalities are experiencing a revival of their demographic and social composition (compare with Dövényi and Kovács, 2006 for Budapest). Alongside the stimulation of community life and the strengthening of the demographic and socio-economic status of the suburban population, specific

problems have emerged in many municipalities. The localities exposed to dynamic or excessive growth now suffer from increasingly insufficient social infrastructure, especially kindergartens and elementary schools. The spatial mismatch between the demand and the supply of social services, entertainment, culture, and work has caused immense increase of traffic flows between the city and the suburban municipalities. Teenagers, young adults and mothers (parents) with small children are among the most disadvantaged groups. The strain on social and technical infrastructure, social polarisation, and transportation problems seem to be the most crucial impacts of suburban development. While it is likely that technical problems will be solved, the different needs of villagers and new suburbanites can lead to the creation of two separate social groups with opposing interests on local development. The most problematic aspect, though not for the suburban municipalities, is the immense growth of individual transportation. Traffic jams are the direct result of suburban development and the dependency of suburban dwellers on cars.



Graph 6. Dwellings completed in Prague and its hinterland during 1990-2007 (relative numbers per 10,000 inhabitants)

Source: Czech statistical office 2008

The growth of traffic density on suburban roads is to a large extent supported by a second form of suburbanisation – the development of commercial functions along the main transportation highways leading to Prague. Hypermarkets, shopping malls, offices, sport facilities, and especially logistical areas which grew up during the transformation period, have attracted more and more trucks not

only to the highways, but also to smaller roads in the metropolitan area. The position of Prague in the centre of Europe, new investment in highways, and liberal legislative provisions towards transportation companies have brought about a huge invasion of logistics operations to the Central Bohemia region. A similar situation is described for Slovakia (Falt'an, 2008) and other Central European post-socialist countries (www.skladuj.cz, 2008). The lack of experience and professional knowledge of local governments led to the carving of large areas for commercial zones in municipal master plans. Presently, the regulation of residential and commercial development falls completely within the responsibility of individual municipalities, accompanied by little regional coordination.



Graph 7 – Suburban housing colonizes many fields within the Prague metropolitan region.

Photos: Martin Ouředníček

Comparing the Czech suburban development with Western European cities, one notices that housing construction around Prague is relatively chaotic and typically involves small scale development projects. While the impact of suburban development on increasing densities of individual transportation is similar to Western cities, the influence on the social environment has a specific nature in post-socialist countries. The growing social polarisation of existing populations with low social status and younger and richer newcomers is a typical feature of settlements with new suburban development. Timár and Váradi (2001:351) argue that post-socialist suburbanisation results in social tensions, segregation, and exclusion - just like those experienced in Western Europe. Detailed research shows that degradation of the social environment is not typical of Czech suburbs (Puldová, Ouředníček, 2006) and elements of segregation occur rarely within suburban communities (Ouředníček, 2007).

Conclusion

At the turn of the millennium Prague is among the most successful regions in the former communist bloc⁵. Its geographic position, historical heritage, economic power, and cultural tradition make the city capable of competing with other centres in Central Europe and of serving as an important gateway for foreign people, cultures, investments, and other flows to the region. European economic, social and cultural elements have been essential features of the Prague environment throughout its historical development. The communist period interrupted this natural development for forty years. The former regime brought specific elements to the pre-war inner structure of the city, some of which – mainly physical features of the city – will survive for decades. While communist symbols and statues disappeared quickly after the Velvet Revolution, large housing estates or transport systems are integral parts of the contemporary city and can only be slowly transformed. The development of settlement system and the general character of urbanisation in Prague (and in many other post-socialist cities) corresponds closely to post-war development in Western European cities, while displaying certain specific features. Jiří Musil speaks of the “modification of a universal model of urbanisation” in socialist cities, and argues that the impact of state socialism was highly significant in the socio-spatial structure of central areas and peripheries (Musil, 2001: 294). During the post-socialist era, new processes emerged to shape the urban environment and spatial structure of contemporary Prague including international migration, internationalization, suburbanization, and revitalization. The new urban processes seem to work in two ways, bringing both positive and negative consequences. Increasing car traffic, the decline of the city centre population, demographic aging and social deterioration of some housing estates, unregulated suburban development are only some of the problems which need to be tackled by local governments.

Grzegorz Weclawowicz (1998) compared the contemporary development of social structures in Prague, Budapest, and Warsaw and concluded that a large part of the society had suffered a considerable economic decline, and that the majority of the people had lost rather than gained from the economic transformation. Although the growing social, economic and ethnic differentiation of Prague's population is slowly being transformed into spatial patterns of physical and social environment, many elements of socialist, industrial, and even medieval development still persist, and together create the specific milieu of today's city. Thanks to the communist legacy, the moderate course of the new urban processes, and to welfare security, the social costs of post-socialist urban

⁵ The unemployment rate on 31st October 2008 was 2.06% (5.20% in the Czech Republic); Average salary 29,697 CZK (23,569 CZK in the Czech Republic); CZSO, 2008.

development have been so far restrained. However, conflicts between different demographic and social groups do emerge in certain areas, and more serious problems may burden the city in the future.

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