

THE GEOGRAPHY OF POST-COMMUNIST CITIES: RESEARCH AGENDA FOR 2000+

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Abstract: This contribution suggests research topics for the investigation of changing urban geographies of post-communist cities. It is argued that the study of communist city is an unfinished project and there is a need for comparative studies of both different cities under communism and communist and capitalist cities. Since the research on post-communist cities has been up-to-now primarily focused on case studies of individual cities, there is also a need for a comparative research of post-communist cities to establish a base knowledge for generalisations and model-building. Finally, several topics are proposed for the research of changes in the internal-spatial structure of post-communist cities.

Key words: post-communist city, internal spatial structure, research agenda

1. INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of this contribution is to suggest research topics for the investigation of changing urban geographies of post-communist cities. The considerations are limited to cities in transitional countries of East Central Europe. However, they should be to a large extent also applicable to post-communist cities in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe. The starting point for the study of contemporary changes in urban geography of post-communist city must be a well-developed knowledge of internal spatial structure of communist city. (Urban literature usually uses the term socialist city. However, in this paper I will use a term communist city, which meaning is identical with the former term.) However, there are contradictions in the existing literature on cities during communism. In my view, the study of the communist city is an unfinished project. It is argued that there is a need for

comparative studies of both different cities under communism and communist and capitalist cities, which could help to consolidate our knowledge of the geography of communist city. The paper further documents that the research on post-communist cities during the 1990s has been atomised, primarily focused on case studies of individual cities. Therefore, there is also a need for a comparative research of post-communist cities, which would help us to establish a base knowledge for generalisations and model-building. In the final part, topics are proposed and discussed for the research of internal-spatial change in post-communist cities.

2. RESEARCH OF COMMUNIST CITIES IS AN UNFINISHED PROJECT

There is ample academic literature devoted to the internal spatial structure of communist city. The bulk of it are studies based on the research conducted in one city or cities within one country, such as Ciechocinska (1987), Dangschat (1987), Grime and Weclawowicz (1981), Weclawowicz (1979, 1989) on Warsaw, Musil (1968, 1987), Matějů et al. (1979) on Prague, Enyedi and Szirmai (1992), Kovács (1992), Ladányi (1989) on Budapest, Szelényi (1983) on Pecs and Szeged or Bezák (1987, 1988, in Slovak) on Bratislava. The seminal book edited by French and Hamilton (1979) "The Socialist City: Spatial Structure and Urban Policy" also contains only contributions on individual cities, with an exception of the comparative study of Prague and Sofia by Carter (1979).

Some authors attempted to make generalisations about communist cities. D.M. Smith (1989, 1996) offers a well-written summary of the existing work about cities under communism. Hamilton (1979) presented the most explicit generalisation of the internal spatial structure of a communist city. Szelenyi (1983) and Weclawowicz (1992) also attempted to develop a general description of both spatial patterns and mechanisms, which shaped the spatial structure of communist cities.

The literature is not uniform in its interpretation of communist cities and there are still some unresolved questions concerning communist city. For instance, Smith (1996, p. 96) points that while some describe the socio-spatial pattern of communist city as a mosaic or patchwork, others claim the existence of relatively large and socially homogeneous areas (see also discussion of this issue in Szelenyi 1987). Literature also offers different answers to the question whether socio-spatial inequalities increased or decreased during communism and its individual phases, especially from the 1960s to the fall of communism. While most authors accentuate mechanisms which generated inequalities during communism and especially their increasing role from the 1960s (Hegedüs and Tosics 1983, Kovács 1992, Musil 1987, Szelenyi 1987), segregation indices calculated by Ladányi (1989) and Csizmady (1998) for Budapest show stability or even decline in socio-spatial differences.

Were there important differences between communist cities or was it the application of different methods, which led to different conclusions? I would accentuate following points. First, the quantitative analyses of spatial patterns and socio-spatial inequalities, which were applied in individual city studies, were based on differing methods, used different variables and different spatial scales. Therefore, we can hardly distinguish how much was the difference or similarity in research results caused by (1) the reality investigated and (2) the methods employed. Second, there has been an insufficient integration of the mostly quantitative analyses of spatial patterns with the qualitative analyses of mechanisms, which shaped spatial patterns. There are studies, which argue about the increase in socio-spatial inequalities through the reference to various processes of social differentiation, however, without documenting this empirically. Without a good empirical knowledge, our interpretations can be misleading. Unfortunately, the empirical analyses with a strong focus on urban spatial structure often did not go far behind the simple description of patterns.

There is a need for comparative analysis of several communist cities, based on the application of the same research method. The standard quantitative techniques using segregation indices and multivariant methods such as factorial or cluster analysis can be easily employed to identify similarities and differences in socio-spatial patterns and their development during communism.

The same applies to the comparative analysis of communist and capitalist (especially West European) cities. Most researchers would agree that the socio-spatial structure of communist cities was more homogeneous, with smaller degree of socio-spatial disparities than in capitalist cities. However, they will dispute how much was the segregation different. Were there larger differences between a typical communist city and a typical capitalist city or within groups of communist or capitalist cities?

3. CHALLENGES FOR THE RESEARCH OF POST-COMMUNIST CITY

There is also a need for comparative research on post-communist cities. Three edited books (Andrusz et al. 1996; Kovács and Wiessner 1997; Enyedi 1998a) and a large number of journal articles (including some special issues of journals, such as *GeoJournal* vol. 42, no. 4, 1997 on Russian cities, *GeoJournal* on post-socialist cities (forthcoming) or *Moravian Geographical Reports* vol. 3, no. 1, 2, 1995 on Brno, Budapest and Ljubljana) were published during the 1990s. However, most writings are on single cities. There are some comparative papers on two or three cities in Enyedi (1998a). Contributions by Kovács (1997), Duke and Grime (1997), Ghanbari-Parsa and Moatazed-Keivani (1999) are examples from a small family of comparative studies on post-communist cities. They do not analyse changes in urban spatial structures, however, can be used as a background information for the explanation of changing intra-urban

patterns of post-communist cities. The work of Lichtenberger on Budapest, Prague and Vienna (1994, and her contributions in Fassmann and Lichtenberger 1995) links the general processes of political and economic change with transformations in urban property, housing and labour markets and their implications for changing spatial patterns. Unfortunately, it is limited to the very beginning of transformations in the first years of the 1990s.

While the comparisons of cities in transitional countries are scarce, comparisons of post-communist cities and contemporary capitalist (West European) cities virtually do not exist. The exception is an edited collection of papers, which compares ódz and Manchester (Liszewski, Young 1997). In a recent review of Musterd, Ostendorf (1998) book "Urban Segregation and the Welfare State" Lee (1999) points that the editors comfortably focus on western cities, while cities from Asian-tiger-states and especially from post-communist cities are not included.

Another feature of contemporary studies and a challenge for coming years is the lack of generalisations and model-building concerning post-communist city. The existing generalisations are mostly written by westerners, such as Häussermann (1997), Fassmann (1997), Széleányi (1996). These generalisations are mainly focused on the city under communism with some notes about post-communist developments. The only exception among scholars from Central and Eastern Europe is Enyedi (1998b), who offers a broad account of processes that influence urban change during transition. However, transformations in intra-urban spatial patterns are omitted. In my view, the generalisation and model-building concerning post-communist cities can not be successfully completed prior a substantive empirically based comparative research is accomplished.

I would also stress a need for the investigation of spatial structures. Most of recent (from the 1970s) western urban literature has been focused on social processes and investigated casual relations behind the production of spatial structures. It was partly due to the refusal of spatial fetishism, which appeared in the 1960s. In the 1980s, there were several attempts to discuss the integration of social processes and spatial structures into a coherent research framework (such as Gregory and Urry 1985). However, such discussion remained on a general level without attempts to operationalise it for empirical research. The locality research realised in the UK went furthest in this aspect. However, it has rather focused on the casual relations behind spatial changes (which is great) omitting more substantive empirical investigation of spatial patterns itself. I would argue for the integration of spatial analysis and social analysis, with the focus on spatial patterns, contextual social (the term includes also economic, political and cultural) processes and mechanisms, which produce spatial structures. I call for the integration of spatial, behavioural and structural analyses.

I will give an example. It is taken for granted that suburbanisation or gentrification develops in post-communist cities. Literature focus on the discussion of social changes behind these processes, on causes of these processes, etc., but a sound empirical investigation of whether they exist, what is their extent, how important are they in the context of the overall urban change, etc., this is missing. For instance, Neil Smith (1996) in his book "The New Urban Frontier" includes a case study on gentrification and the

new capitalism in Budapest. While a number of Hungarian urban researchers to whom he refers write that there are preconditions or potential for gentrification, Smith's presentation suggests that gentrification is rapidly developing (see Figure 8.2 in Smith (1996, p. 176), which speaks for itself). I have not seen any empirical research to be done on post-communist gentrification in Budapest, unfortunately, and many scholars are rather sceptical about it happening in the city.

4. SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR THE RESEARCH OF POST-COMMUNIST CITIES

In this final section, I suggest five topics for the research of transformations in the internal spatial structure of post-communist cities.

♦ **Is there population growth or decline? Will social status of post-communist cities decline?**

Under-urbanisation thesis of Szelenyi (1996) suggests population increase in post-communist cities through immigration. However, some post-communist cities, such as Prague or Budapest lose their population through out-migration. Who are the out-migrants? Why they move off the city? Literature suggests that there are several types of out-migration:

1. suburbanisation of new rich,
2. outflow of less wealthy households to countryside as a response to increasing costs of urban life,
3. young people seeking a green alternative of consumer/urban society.

Is there a social-status difference between in-migrants and out-migrants? Ladányi and Szelenyi (1998), Sýkora and Čermák (1998), Sýkora (1999a) suggests that post-communist cities lose rich and gain less wealthy population. Will be the traditional socio-spatial pattern of communist city (social status declining with the distance from the city centre) reversed?

♦ **Urbanisation or suburbanisation? Compact city or urban sprawl?**

In Prague, both trends have developed (Sýkora 1999b). After an initial one-sided preference for suburban single family housing in the first half of the 1990s, there is now growing interest in apartments in condominiums and in reconstructed apartments in historic neighbourhoods, where foreign-led gentrification develops. The future development of urban form has important policy implications. Especially the development of suburbanisation rapidly increases the interconnectedness between the city and suburban zone and calls for the co-ordination of governance and planning between city government and municipal governments in the city hinterland. This is in particular needed in the field of transport networks (roads for wealthy and public

transport for poorer populations; these two social groups now contrasts in settlements affected by suburbanisation in the 1990s).

♦ **What is the future of out-of-commercial-centre inner-city neighbourhoods? Growth or decline, gentrification or ghettoisation?**

Smith (1996) presents central and inner city of Budapest as rapidly gentrifying area. Ladányi and Szélényi (1998, p. 84) write that in Budapest, the inner urban areas can rapidly become urban slums, although they are eminently suitable for gentrification. Wiessner (1997) and Ladányi (1997) are very sceptical about the future of inner city areas in Pest. It is not easy to answer simply what is happening in inner city neighbourhoods. Empirical field research in neighbourhoods is needed. I expect very different trajectories of neighbourhood change, conditioned by various local circumstances (a different character of such neighbourhoods between cities and within cities, the role of privatisation methods, etc.).

♦ **What is the future of housing estates built during communism?**

Szelenyi (1996, p. 288) writes, "... the mass housing developments built during the socialist phase, are experiencing a deep crisis. These formerly privileged zones are losing their social status ...", but Berey (1997, p. 212) states that "... the large-scale outmigration, and the general devaluation of most of the housing estates ... has not started yet [in Hungary]. . the original middle-status population has not given its place to the lower status layers yet". Csizmady (1998) and Maier (1997) expressed similar position to Berey. Will there be an overall decline or differentiated futures? Csizmady (1998), Berey (1997) and Maier (1997) argue and put some evidence for the differentiation. For instance, Csizmady (1998, p. 164-165) states that "prices of flats in housing estates of higher statuses increased to greater extent than those of lower social status". Berey (1997) see the housing estates reconstruction as an important task for contemporary urban government. Maier (1997) thinks that the social mix and empty sites which can be easily linked to existing infrastructure are a good potential and suggest both to provide better housing through in-fills and the improvement of existing housing stock.

♦ **Where are the future ghettos and citadels? Is there growth in social inequalities and will it influence the development of spatial segregation in post-communist cities?**

In all transitional countries, there is growth in income disparities. But, are there differences between cities in Central and East European countries? I expect that the more to the East the higher inequalities are being developed. How rapid was the increase in social inequalities? Are they higher than in Western Europe? What is their implication for new forms of spatial segregation and separation? What is the role of new foreign immigrants in formerly relatively homogeneous cities? Foreign immigrants include very distinct groups:

1. rich westerners working in international businesses,
2. small traders from Asia (mostly Chinese and Vietnamese),
3. manual workers from Ukraine, etc.,

4.refugees from different parts of the world (for instance Kosovo),

5.mafia (Russian, Ukrainian, Albanian, ...).

In Prague, the first and second groups are residentially relatively stabilised. Will they produce new patterns of separation and segregation? Where are the future ghettos and citadels (to use Peter Marcuse (1997) terms)? Inner city declining quarters (Ladányi) or housing estates (Szelényi)? Gentrified or upgraded inner city neighbourhoods or suburban districts? Will social conflicts emerge in places of radical change, such as in the case of displacement of residential by commercial uses (city centre commercialisation), displacement of local population by rich newcomers (gentrification), contrasting populations living in one place (gentrification, suburbanisation)? Is city politics prepared to deal with such change and conflict?

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Resume

Geografie postkomunistických měst: výzkumná agenda pro období od roku 2000

Příspěvek navrhuje a diskutuje témata výzkumu geografie postkomunistických měst v období od roku 2000. Studium komunistických měst je považováno za neuzavřený projekt. Zdůrazňována je zejména potřeba doplnit stávající znalosti o srovnávací studii komunistických měst mezi sebou i komunistických a kapitalistických měst. Výzkum postkomunistických měst byl v devadesátých letech zaměřen především na případové studie jednotlivých měst. V nadcházejícím období je potřeba postupně docházet k zobecňování a vytváření modelů prostorových změn v postkomunistických městech. Nezbytným předpokladem pro generalizaci poznatků je dostatečná empirická základna vytvořená srovnávacími studii měst v různých postkomunistických zemích. V závěrečné části příspěvku je navrženo pět témat pro výzkum změn ve vnitřní prostorové struktuře postkomunistických měst.

1. Dochází k populačnímu růstu či úbytkům obyvatel měst? Dojde k poklesu sociálního statusu?
2. Urbanizace či suburbanizace? Kompaktní či rozvolněné město?
3. Jaká je budoucnost čtvrtí vnitřního města? Růst či úpadek, gentrifikace nebo ghettoizace?
4. Jaká je budoucnost sídlišť postavených za komunismu?
5. Kde se zformují budoucí gheta a citadely? Dochází k růstu sociálních nerovností a povedou k segregaci a separaci sociálních vrstev v městském prostoru?