

THE DECADE OF SHRINKING IN BRATISLAVA AT THE TURN OF CENTURIES: AN ATTEMPT FOR EXPLANATION

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Abstract: This contribution attempts to explain briefly the signs and substance of shrinking in Bratislava at the turn of centuries. Although the first look indicates clear shrinking processes in Bratislava, we have to be very careful in search for reasons of such development. Bratislava is specific case combining contradictory processes of suburbanisation, unbalanced age structure and local economy expansion. It is very good case documenting strong influence of age structure in inducing shrinking phases in urban development. Short term one-generational migration flows that happen in its history is not easy to erase from its current population development. Of course, it depends if it is multiplied by such processes as suburbanisation, or it is moderated or even transformed by economic growth generating in-migration thanks to new jobs, good salaries and attractive living conditions. The case of Bratislava documents possibility to cope with shrinking thanks to good phase of economic development combined with pro-development market based policy performed by local self-government.

Key words: shrinking, demography, urban development, Bratislava, self-government

1 INTRODUCTION

Capital cities usually are the largest, growing and the most important cities in their respective countries. They benefit from the positive effects of well-working economic base, attractiveness for investments, or location of national institutions. If there appear situation of longer term population decline, as one of primary indicators of shrinking (e.g. Steinführer and Haase, 2007), it raises attention. We can observe permanent population growth with exception of the last two decades during modern history of Bratislava. More precisely, it is the case of population decline for the period of one decade around the turn of centuries (in absolute number almost 30 thousand in 1996-2004). There emerged questions concerning reasons that led to such development. Besides local economic restructuring and decline as primary factor related to shrinking processes (as quite usual reason of shrinking is mentioned

e.g. by Bontje, 2005; Wiechmann and Pallagst, 2012), we have to pay much more detailed attention to demographic development, including migration flows. One of the key issues is, if such case of shrinking in the capital city is permanent feature of the development, or we can observe only interim decline, not mentioning potential cyclical nature of shrinking processes. Besides the reasons and timing of shrinking processes, it is important to identify serious partial problems related to shrinking in large city, even if it is interim situation. Special reflection requires approaches and policies that led to escaping from shrinking (e.g. Wiechmann and Bontje, 2015).

Processes of shrinking as an important practical and scientific topic has been analysed all around the world (e.g. Pallagst, Wiechmann and Martinez-Fernandez, 2014). It had started to be more frequent issue in many Central and Eastern European countries (e.g. Steinführer and Haase, 2007; Mykhnenko and Turok, 2008; Stryjakiewicz, 2014). Turbulent social and economic times, with accompanying demographic processes, seriously hit many cities. Shrinking started to be perceived as an important and complex issue, focusing not only on demographic development, but as well as on issues as economic decline and reconstruction, oversupply in housing, devastating large sections of cities (industrial, housing, public spaces), related social issues, difficulties in public services provision (e.g. education, social services), or diminishing tax base and threat to local government finance. Besides attention to causes of shrinking, growing interest attracted policies and strategies “against” shrinking (e.g. Wiechmann and Bontje, 2015).

Shrinking is less extensively although growingly discussed in Slovakia. Among rare cases we can mentioned e.g. study prepared by Bleha and Buček (2010) dealing with population and social policies in Bratislava, as well as their study (Buček and Bleha, 2013) focusing on planning aspects of shrinking in Slovak large cities. Case study of shrinking process in Banská Štiavnica (Buček and Bleha, 2014) reflected interesting case of shrinking in former flourishing mining city. Ďurček and Richter (2014) also analysed demographic aspects of urban shrinking in Slovakia. This issue is under debate also in Czechia. For example, Rumpel and Slach (2012) deeply analysed shrinking processes in North-Moravian, traditionally mining and industrial city of Ostrava. Situation in Czech cities including their regeneration strategies outlined in his contribution also Schmeidler (2014).

Main objective of this contribution is to identify signs and substance of shrinking in Bratislava and contribute to existing international debate concerning experiences with shrinking. As Grossmann et al. (2013) and Haase et al. (2013) outlined, there exists plurality of shrinking cities pathways. We also ask the question, which factors have contributed to such specific demographic development and to which extent any specific policies moderated processes of shrinking. It can be related predominantly to general social and economic development, as well as urban development policy approaches. There are also more conceptual approaches possible. Important role can have post-socialist transitional context, or we can search for longer term path-dependency. We provide introduction into these issues based on standard time series of population data, combined with reflection of development documents and praxis in Bratislava during observed period (1992 until 2010). We argue that

Bratislava had faced population shrinking with specific features, combining specific population behaviour, namely reflecting the influence of age structure and suburbanisation related migration. This trend had been also reversed particularly thanks to strong social and economic development during the second half of the first decade of this century and pro-development oriented local development approaches.

2 THE DEMOGRAPHIC SUBSTANCE OF SHRINKING

Bratislava, the capital city of Slovakia, despite being national metropolis, it is mid-sized city in Central East European context. Its population number has been slightly above 430 thousand (2010). However, one hundred years ago, city had only about 110 thousand inhabitants. Although Bratislava started to concentrate important industry already since the second half of 19th century, it had been so-called socialist industrialisation that we can consider as the most intensive development driving force. During this period 1950-1990 its population grew up from 210 thousand to 442 thousand (Figure 1). This period of population growth reflects three primary factors – incorporation of neighbouring rural settlements, migration growth and natural increase. As a result of spatial integration of neighbouring settlements during previous century (until seventies of 20th century), Bratislava composes 17 city quarters and covers total area of 368 square km.

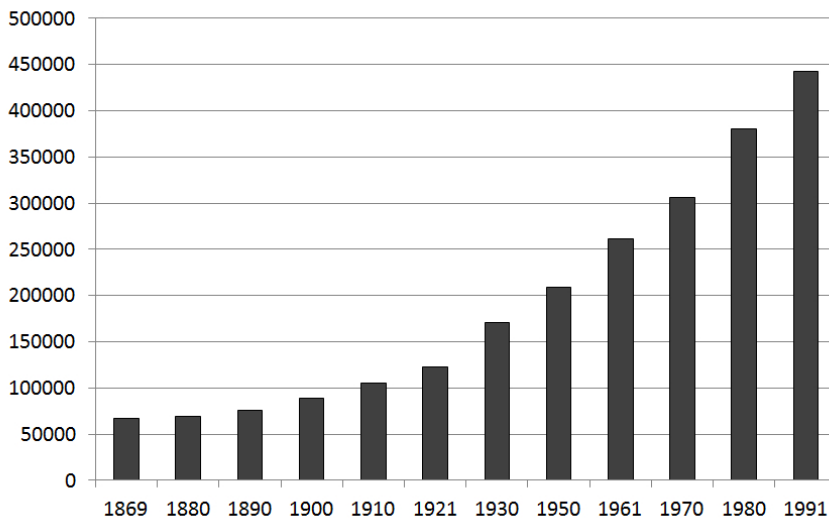


Figure 1 Population number development 1869-1991 (according to population censuses). Source: Federal Statistical Office 1978, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2003.

In attempt to understand the nature of shrinking in Bratislava we have to pay large attention to the demographic processes. More detailed population dynamics data we analyse for years 1992 to 2010. When focusing on population number, we can observe slow population decrease during second half of nineties. Much extensive change is indicated at the turn of centuries. It is related to population census hold in 2001. Demographic statistics did not reflect certain part of foreign out-migration, as well as population flow to suburban areas (suburbanization during observed period covered e.g. Slavik et al., 2011). The core of this problem caused known problem of not reported changes on moving citizens to population registry. Population census revealed unregistered changes from previous years. It documented deeper population decline as previously known from population statistics. Nevertheless, decrease of population has been prevailing until mid of decade and population growth period started since year 2005. This decade of shrinking needs explanation.

Basic aspects of population dynamics demonstrate Figure 2. An introduction to more detailed explanation of this development can start with natural movement. It is especially sharp decrease of fertility and postponement of births that caused such decrease of births. Within the last years we can see recuperation of previously postponed birth that results in natural increase of population of the capital city.

Bratislava principally changed its migration flows during post-socialist period of development (Figure 2). It had been migratory gaining only during the first years after change of regime. It reflected completion of housing development that started already before 1989. Afterwards, city had been losing population especially as a result of suburbanization, and collapse of new housing construction. Migration trend also altered after year 2005. Suburbanisation had been balanced by rising attraction to live in the city. The positive local economy development accompanied new housing completion within city borders led to migratory gains. In total, Bratislava has been facing the positive trend in population growth since 2006 thanks both the natural increase and net migration. The question still remains, if the numbers are real due to the problems with migration evidence mainly. It is supposed that the actual population number is higher than the official one, even if we take into consideration so called habitual residence (in Slovak - "obvyklý pobyt"). Future development will come from the three major factors:

- a) development of suburbanization – some decline is expected,
- b) migration inflow – steady or slightly growing trend is expected,
- c) strong population ageing – due to the ageing of the big generations of migrants from 1960s-1980s this assumption is very certain.

We cannot overlook issue of age structure, if debating Bratislava's decade of shrinking. It provides important argument why we could observe shrinking in capital city without any significant economic problems. Decrease of population is partly caused by influence of specific age structure of population in Bratislava. As we already analysed in a case of Bratislava (Bleha and Buček, 2010), differently numerous cohorts of expectant mothers have different numbers of children at the stable fertility, which establishes unbalanced age structure also for future. Typical case is originally one generational housing estate in Petržalka (the largest city quarter with

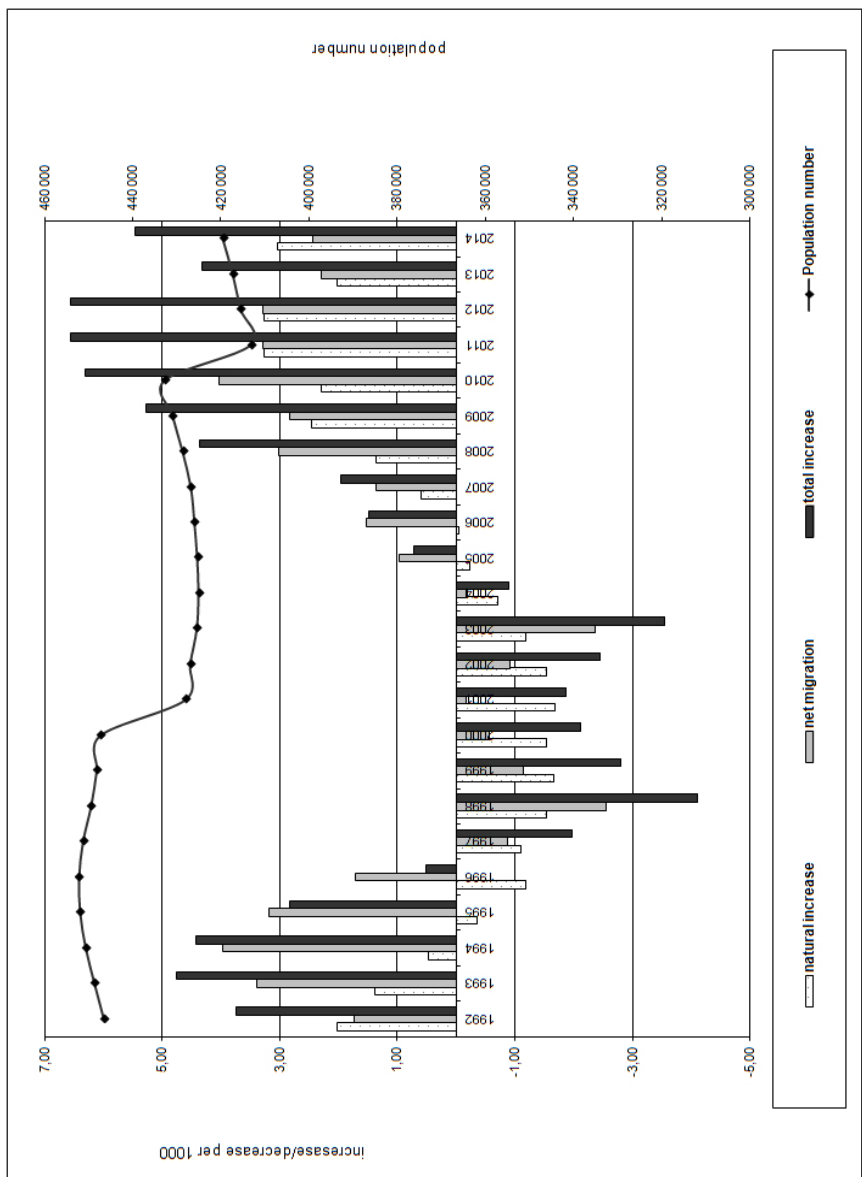


Figure 2 Population dynamics. Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2015.

more than 100 thousand inhabitants). The expected number of pupils here will be 2.5 times higher in year 2025, according to population forecast. On the opposite, numerous cohorts of elderly generate large pressure on social services for elderly. Average age increased in Bratislava from 37.54 (1998) to 40.82 (2009), when Slovak average is 38.5 (2009). For example, in city centre city quarter Staré Mesto, according to population forecast, average age will be almost 50 years in 2025 (Bleha and Vaňo, 2008).

Bratislava has the best educated population in Slovakia, even comparing to other Slovak cities. In 2001, share of population with university education was 25 per cent, while in other large Slovak cities it is below 20 per cent and Slovak average is about 10 per cent. Number of persons per one apartment has been 2.36 in 2001. Number of single person households is increasing. More positive are indicators concerning social and economic situation in Bratislava, e.g. comparing to rest of the country. Bratislava's unique position documents fact that average salary had been EUR 1225, comparing to Slovak average EUR 828 (in 2010). Similar picture provides data concerning registered unemployment. While unemployment rate in Bratislava districts (LAU 1 level units) was between 3.2 to 4.6 percent, Slovak average unemployment rate was 12.5 per cent (in December 2010, Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, 2015).

3 ACTIONS ADDRESSING SHRINKING

There has not been applied any specific actions, policy or strategy adopted by public sector actors, explicitly focusing on shrinking. The most important factor in favour of the positive turn has been economic growth that city started to benefit especially during the second half of the decade until financial and economic crisis impact increased. Set of successful economic reforms (e.g. in banking, taxes, privatization) initiated by that time PM M. Dzurinda (1998-2006) positively influenced development in Bratislava.

From the point of view of shrinking, we can consider formation of good pro-development oriented environment, including closer cooperation with private sector as very reasonable contribution of the local self-government (e.g. Buček, 2002). It used natural market forces and competition in selected fields of local development. Public sector actors paid more attention to public spaces and infrastructure. Step by step has been increasing awareness to social services and education support, as shrinking related accompanying effects (Bleha and Buček, 2010).

We can assume that there had been very clear basic approach – the development of the city based predominantly on the private sector. Due to large attraction of the city for private investors, the role of the city government had primarily regulatory character. Nevertheless, city self-government also cooperated with private investors in selected large development projects. The flagship projects were those focusing on the river water-front development (River Park and Eurovea private projects). Attrac-

tion of the city had been converted into rapid expansion in office complexes and housing estates construction.

Local self-government had been aware of its limited possibilities and remained mostly active in more typical public domain. Bratislava heavily invested in improvement of its transport services (new vehicles), transport infrastructure (e.g. new bridge across Danube river), sport facilities (tennis, ice hockey arenas), or in reconstruction of historical buildings in municipal ownership (as old town-hall). These large projects should be balanced by more accessible public facilities for everyday sport, leisure, recreation activities. Substantially has improved standard of public space, not only in city centre, but thanks to city quarters initiatives also in various other spatial sections of the city.

City self-government as well as city quarters improved its planning and programming activities during the second part of decade. New Master Plan, strategic planning documents – Programmes of Economic and Social Development had been elaborated, with important innovations and modernisation approaches. Improved planning and building order administration allowed expansion of construction activities within the city borders. Local self-governments as large property owners activated urban development by selling land in prime location to developers. Clarification of development intentions by Master Plan opened new localities for the development. It approved intensification of the development in numerous places on the large territory of the city. In fact, city has plenty good locations for the development, even for residential sub-urbanisation within city borders. Part of city quarters (Devín, Záhorská Bystrica, Vajnory, Jarovce, Rusovce, Čuňovo) still is more of rural character and offer attractive “suburban” living condition.

Within current key development document “Programme of economic and social development 2010-2020” (Bratislava City Magistracy, 2010), we also can find measures that already reflect experiences with shrinking and better knowledge of population development. Within strategic development theme “Quality of life and human resources” (one of six strategic development themes) were incorporated measures focusing on pro-family policy (services, facilities), quality of life improvement, better social services provision (for elderly), new public social housing (rented) development and provision. It provides more clear vision and explicitly expressed interest, comparing to previously existing less systematic effort in these fields.

4 LEADING ACTORS INVOLVED IN DEVELOPMENT AND ITS FUNDING

The dominant direct roles in Bratislava’s development play local self-government and private sector, in more cases in close co-operation. Under strong pressure of private sector led development, the role of local self-government has not been easy. Local self-government had been criticised for less transparent decision making, insufficient regulation, or blurred direct involvement in some private develop-

ment projects. City self-government realised liberal local development policy, leaving enough activity space for private investors and developers (especially until the time of economic and financial crisis). Certain projects were accompanied by disputes and strong opposition presented e.g. by local public, environmental and heritage protectionist groups (e.g. Buček, 2006; Machala, 2014; Šuška, 2015).

The direct role of the central state has been indispensable in certain fields as infrastructure and public facilities development. Central state provided support in funding e.g. for building new bridge across Danube river, or large ice hockey arena reconstruction. Bratislava extensively used general framework formulated by central state as better conditions in housing support (mortgages, building societies), or good business climate in the country. Important is co-operation and co-ordination of activities among city-wide and city-quarter self-government. City quarters self-governments led by own directly elected mayors have ambition to manage and develop its own territory. Especially in large city quarters they were able to initiate development projects and improve selected aspects of local life.

Quite vibrant is local not for profit, non-governmental sector. They are active in selected field as social services or culture, with strong link to local self-governments. On the other hand, they are in selected cases strong opposition toward self-governmental. Group of environmental organisations went even into sharp conflict over weak regulation and less transparent approach to selected private development activities in Bratislava (e.g. development projects in prominent area below Bratislava Castle and on Danube river-front).

Successful copying with shrinking is based on concentration of large resources allocated into the city. Local self-governments (city-wide, city quarters) could use only limited resources, but they cannot be overlooked. Important had been the role of central state resources supporting infrastructure, sport and cultural facilities development in the city, in practice managed by local self-government. Many initiatives have been based on combination of resources from local self-governments, regional self-government, central state, private and non-governmental actors. Large involvement of local self-government in big development projects led to exaggerated spending and expanding debt (Bratislava City Magistracy, 2011).

There have been concentrated large amount of resources for development in Bratislava within the last years. By far the most important have been private resources spent on various investments bringing new workplaces. Large number on multinational corporations located and/or expanded activities in Bratislava (e.g. VW, IBM, Dell). An attraction of the city for business services had been accompanied by numerous office development projects. Large concentration of private resources counterweighted absence of access to resources from EU funds, due to the fact that Bratislava region has had only limited access to these resources.

Important have been private investment into new housing construction that penetrated into the city since the mid of the first decade of new century. Well established developers not only from Slovakia started to build numerous housing projects. It allowed provision of much more apartments in new quality for inhabitants. It had been supported by much more accessible mortgages for citizens. Despite high

price of apartments in Bratislava comparing the rest of the country, many people working here could afford to buy new housing. It finally led to renewal of migration flow into the city.

5 THE END OF SHRINKING IN BRATISLAVA – OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS

Longer term positive economic development, availability of better paid workplaces, rising number of new dwellings completed, it altogether allowed that significant number of new inhabitants could move to the city and change their status into permanent residency. We have to add that according to our estimation there is more than half a million of inhabitants living in Bratislava (as place of usual stay). Part of this population, which is present daily in Bratislava has place of permanent residence registered in other settlements. Large attention also has been paid to modernisation of old housing stock combined with improved quality of public spaces. It concerned also large socialist housing estates like Petržalka.

Bratislava turned into quickly growing city after the turn of centuries. With short time shift it had been visible also in population development. We can observe population growth from 425 thousand inhabitants (2005) to almost 432 thousand in 2010. While there had been 331 thousand workplaces in 2005, this number increased to 358 thousand in 2008 (companies with 20 and more employees, estimation for the rest of economic active; Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2011). Most of this increase is in business services, public administration, while decline had been indicated in industry and construction sectors.

Thanks to new projects in housing, office development, large scale shopping facilities, city improved its attractiveness and image. It is more attractive not only for work but also for living. Large is portion of single households living in the city. Attraction to living outside the city partly influence worsened transport infrastructure limiting good and quick access to the city. There are still large brown-field areas not properly used (mostly large areas formerly with industrial and transport functions).

Different stage of the development during second part of the decade confirms number of apartments completed. While only 8610 new apartments were completed in 2000-2004, it has been 16478 apartments completed in years 2005-2009 (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2011). Bratislava improved its image as attractive place for work and living. Its attraction for business as well as tourism documents increase in total number of beds in local accommodation facilities from 9200 (2001) to 15100 (2010). International image upgraded organisation of higher rank sport events like 2011 World Ice Hockey championship. New river front developments were completed, including opening of new building of the Slovak National Theatre. Nevertheless, insufficient coordination of development activities led to damages in part of local historical heritage (e.g. local industrial heritage, Šuška, 2008), or conflicts over building of high rise buildings (e.g. Buček, 2006).

6 CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED

Although first look indicate clear shrinking in Bratislava, we have to be very careful in explanation of such development. Bratislava is specific case of shrinking combining age structure of population with processes of suburbanisation and local economy expansion. It is quite extraordinary case primarily thanks to strong influence of age structure in inducing shrinking phases in urban development. Short term migration flows that happen in its history is not easy to erase from its current population development. Of course, it depends if it is multiplied by such processes as suburbanisation, or it is moderated or even transformed by economic growth generating in-migration thanks to new jobs, good salaries and attractive living. This case confirms longer term path dependence of processes in cities to earlier population development. We also cannot underestimate influence of post-socialist transition processes, although not so deep and long term as in other parts of the country. Previous rapid population growth induced by industrialisation, concentration of higher order central functions and massive housing provision has been stopped. City needed time for restructuring e.g. in favour of services economy and needed better macroeconomic framework. Next development will confirm if shrinking is here only episodic, short-term event, or it will appear in future as well, offering opportunity for explanation of cyclical character, e.g. with diminishing scale of shrinking.

Despite strong influence of age structure, the case of Bratislava documents possibility to cope with shrinking thanks to positive macroeconomic development combined with pro-development market based policy performed by local self-government. Many features confirm adoption of typical neoliberal form of urban governance in Bratislava (see also e.g. Buček and Korec 2013). We can find here typical approaches as large scale private development projects, large attention to property based development, more elitist decision-making, less efficient regulation by planning, or cases of less democratic and conflicting development (as drawn e.g. by Swyngedouw, Moulaert and Rodriguez, 2002, or Tasan-Kok, 2009). It is combined with good gateway position, capital city function, good human resources and improved image. However, such policy is possible only in minor number of shrinking cities in Central and Eastern Europe.

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Desať rokov „shrinking“ v Bratislave na prelome storočí: pokus o vysvetlenie

Súhrn

V poslednom období sa venuje veľká pozornosť procesom „shrinking“, ktoré sa týkajú aj mnohých miest v Strednej a Východnej Európe. Bratislava sa tiež počas uplynulých rokov podobnému vývoju nevyhla. Nemôže nám však uniknúť špecifický charakter takéhoto vývoja, ako aj spôsob, akým sa Bratislava z tohto vývoja vymanila. V jej prípade dochádza ku kombinácii až protichodných procesov suburbanizácie, vplyvu nevyváženej vekovej štruktúry obyvateľstva a expanzie miestnej ekonomiky a rozvojových aktivít.

Mesto je veľmi dobrým príkladom silného vplyvu vekovej štruktúry v indukovaní „shrinking“ fázy rozvoja. Silné, hoci časovo obmedzené migračné toky z histórie, nie je ľahké vymazať ani zo súčasného populačného vývoja. V prípade Bratislavy tento vývoj bol súčasne na jednej strane znásobený silným procesom suburbanizácie a na druhej strane zmierňovaný procesom rozvoja, ktorý postupne generoval dostatočné imigračné toky obyvateľstva do mesta na báze dostatku pracovných miest, vyšších miezd a príťažlivosti pre život.

Okrem pozitívnych makroekonomických podmienok k rozvoju v prípade Bratislavy prispela aj protrhovo orientovaná politika miestnej samosprávy v tomto období. V mnohých črtách sa opierala o skúsenosti s neoliberálnou rozvojovou politikou. Mohli sme v tomto období pozorovať jej typické črty ako veľké projekty výstavby, neefektívna regulácia rozvoja otvárajúca veľké možnosti súkromnej iniciatíve, viaceré prípady konfliktov ohľadom rozvojových zámerov. Tento prístup bol kombinovaný s jej tradične príťažlivou „bránovou“ polohou, funkciou hlavného mesta, pozitívnym ľudskými zdrojmi prítomnými v meste a jeho lepšiacim sa imidžom.