

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AS A FUTURE CHALLENGE FOR CITIES IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

by
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ABSTRACT. Contemporary cities in East Central Europe (ECE) represent a hybrid type of urban development which is still generally considered to be a special case and is only exceptionally referred to in the recently intensified debate over the European city. Our paper argues that such exclusion is short-sighted because ECE cities face structural problems similar to those of their Western pendants. Therefore, the contextual frame of urban research needs to be widened and can no longer be restricted to post-socialist transition. In this regard, one of the main challenges for future urban development will be the consequences of demographic change. Ageing, new patterns of fertility behaviour and more diversified household structures in line with the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) will have significant implications for urban structures and housing markets, as already known for Western Europe. The purpose of this paper is to work out new questions and hypotheses for future urban research with special respect to Polish and Czech cities. Besides West European experience, recent developments in eastern Germany are taken as a frame of reference, assuming that this specific transition case may, in many respects, be regarded as a forerunner for similar developments in its neighbouring countries.

Key words: demographic change, urban development, inner city, East Central Europe

Introduction

This paper discusses the demographic changes associated with the so-called Second Demographic Transition (SDT) (van de Kaa, 1987, 2004; Lesthaeghe, 1995; Buzar *et al.*, 2005) in East Central Europe (ECE) and assesses, in particular, their probable impact on urban places, with particular focus on inner-city residential neighbourhoods. Our goal is to propose a new set of relevant and hitherto bypassed research questions and hypotheses regarding cities in post-socialist countries, thus expanding the conceptual basis and initiating a debate on the impact of demographic change upon urban development.

In the recent past, cities in ECE underwent profound political, functional, economic and socio-spatial changes. A vast body of scientific literature

emerged, and theories of different provenience helped to understand and explain the manifold expressions of post-socialist urban transition (e.g. Musil, 1993; Andrusz *et al.*, 1996; Kovács and Wießner, 1997; Enyedi, 1998; Kostinskiy, 2001; Altrock *et al.*, 2005).

Quite soon it became obvious that the neo-liberal assumptions about a pure replacement of institutions and mentalities as well as about a simple convergence towards Western-style, post-Fordist modernization were not sufficient for an adequate interpretation of the transition processes (Grabher and Stark, 1997; Pine and Bridger, 1998, pp. 3–7; Burawoy, 1999, p. 303; Hann, 2002b; Bradshaw and Stenning, 2003, pp. 12–14). In fact, it is the simultaneousness, interdependence and overlapping of different processes and structure which renders the changes in ECE and its cities unique.

Transition itself has been unveiled as a ‘highly problematic term’ (Pine and Bridger, 1998, p. 2). While some authors underscore the development of hybrid new structures consisting of elements of both socialist and pre-socialist tradition as well as of ingredients of Western societies (Steinführer, 2001, p. 218; Beyer, 2004, p. 75), others point especially to the prevailing persistence of socialist patterns (Hann, 2002a, pp. 5, 11; Verdery, 2002, p. 21; Lowe, 2003, p. xvi). In this comprehension, the category ‘post-socialism’ may still be conceived of as providing a fruitful conceptual framework. Hence, the time has not yet come to lay it to rest, as Humphrey (2002, p. 15) proposes for an indefinite future.

While recognizing the high significance of post-socialist transition and the legacies from socialism for urban structures in ECE currently and in the future, this article aspires to go one step further. We argue that, despite continuing differences in comparison with West European cities worth investigating, urban development in post-socialist countries needs to be integrated into a broader discursive – e.g. European – context since the exceptional position of

ECE is no longer justified in all respects. It is striking that the recently intensified debate about the European city (Hassenpflug, 2002; Le Galès, 2002; Kazepov, 2004; Siebel, 2004) as a rule still leaves out ECE. Yet, such exclusions are short-sighted because 'Eastern' cities are already facing, or will face, structural challenges similar to their 'Western' counterparts such as increased land consumption, the proliferation of inner-city brownfields, social and regional polarization, or demographic and household changes. ECE cities are – so far as our hypothesis is concerned – influenced by both general Europe-wide developmental trends and, in its current form, ongoing post-socialist transition. Furthermore, changes have to be conceived as a dynamic interplay between macro-structures and small-scale behaviour (Berdahl, 2000, p. 5).

Since it is beyond the scope of a single contribution to consider all these challenges in detail, one especially meaningful process – demographic changes in line with the SDT – and its probable implications for urban structures have been singled out and will be discussed in detail below. This choice is due to the fact that current population and household developments will have significant consequences for the socio-spatial organization and the housing markets of cities in ECE in the future. However, since 'housing demography' (Myers, 1990) still represents a rather neglected area of urban research – both in the West and the East – and systematic knowledge regarding household structures in ECE is rare, the following considerations are still in need of more thorough empirical testing.¹ Therefore, our article is first of all meant as a position paper. Its purpose is to work out new questions and hypotheses for future urban research on post-socialist countries, to broaden its conceptual basis and to initiate a debate on the impact of demographic changes upon urban developments.

In a double sense, the paper will also be spatially restricted: first of all, to East Central (instead of the whole of Eastern) Europe and more specifically to Poland and the Czech Republic – based upon the contention that the region is and always was too diverse to regard it as a monolithic unit. Second, the focus of the argument will be on one type of residential neighbourhood, namely inner-city areas, which were only rarely dealt with up until now in urban transition research. In addition, due to their specific heritage function, building stock, ownership structures and history in the socialist period, they are a case in point for demonstrating the importance of housing demography for urban research.

While discussing imaginable future trends and developing new research questions with special respect to interdependencies between demographic behaviour and urban developments, a key issue to be highlighted is to what extent – and by which methodologies – theoretical approaches and concepts as well as practical experience from Western Europe and eastern Germany (certainly a specific case of post-socialist transition) may be transferred to ECE cities, and which limits of such a transfer need to be taken into account. These questions will also be dealt with in the course of the argument.

The paper is structured into three sections: the first considers recent demographic changes and their impact on inner cities in Western Europe and eastern Germany; the second section looks at changing housing demographics as a blind spot in post-socialist urban research; the third discusses some methodological implications with respect to the transfer of knowledge and cross-cultural comparison. Finally, some conclusions are drawn with respect to the ambiguous character of post-socialist research as both integrating ECE into the broader European debate and, at the same time, impeding the recognition of some innovative developments which could influence the conceptual model of the 'European city' in general.

Demographics matter: the 'Western' and east German experiences

Rethinking conceptual links between demographic and urban change

One of the starting points of this paper is the contention that closer linkages between urban and demographic research would provide a deeper understanding of basic processes and driving forces of urban development in general and more specifically in different European regions. Critical readers might argue that urban and housing studies, to a certain degree, always deal with demographics and that these interlinkages are far from being new. The following three examples illustrate this claim.

First of all, the total number of inhabitants and their changes, mainly extreme ones, are crucial factors for urban development. Classical urbanization in the nineteenth century (in the course of industrialization) and contemporary mega-urbanization in developing countries are, in particular, characterized by massive in-migration bringing about severe housing, hygienic and ecological problems for the rapidly growing cities. Urban decline in West European and North American industrial regions from

the 1960s onwards or the recent process of decisive population shrinkage in most East German cities constitute the opposite phenomenon which, however, also lead to significant challenges, such as derelict lots and unoccupied dwellings, housing market imbalances, insufficiently used amenities and increasing public costs (Glock and Häußermann, 2004; Oswalt, 2004).

Second, life cycle and family status are important dimensions of socio-spatial disparities in cities. Classical ecological and social area approaches (Burgess, 1925; Shevky and Bell, 1961) have already extracted family status (related to fertility, size and structure of households, and women's participation in the workforce) as one of the main dimensions of residential segregation. Urban areas possess specific characteristics desirable for and accessible to specific living arrangements. Households will remain at certain locations and adapt them to their housing needs for as long as possible. Hence, both selective mobility and 'aging in place' (Gober, 1990, p. 243) lead to distinct demographic landscapes in cities.

Third, it is households, not individuals, who decide upon where to live and whether to stay at a certain location or to leave it (Rossi, 1980; Gober, 1990). Hence, these living arrangements always 'have a geography as well as a demography' (Ogden and Hall, 2004, p. 95), and by this very quality they impact upon urban housing markets and residential segregation patterns. Households are established, change their composition, their location, break up and undergo rearrangements. And while the demand side is in a constant state of flux, supply structures are characterized by a high persistency, thus leading to interesting research questions concerning social adaptation and coping behaviour in the course of time.

Why, then, is it necessary to rethink and to strengthen the relationship between demographics and urban development? The (seemingly) simple answer is: because macro- and micro-demographic processes play an ever greater part in contemporary societies and impact, whether delayed or mediated, upon the cities. As Clark (1987, p. 122) contended: 'The demographic drives, especially those related to household formation, childbearing, and men's and women's roles in society ... are powerful explanatory concepts which can stand as intermediate-scale explanatory approaches to understanding the spatial organization of society' (cf. also Ogden and Hall, 2004, p. 102).

Both North American and European societies are

currently experiencing processes of decisive and apparently irreversible population changes, with 'the unprecedented low level of fertility, coupled with the increased expectation of life at advanced ages' being the key patterns (van de Kaa, 2004, p. 7). Demographers coined the term Second Demographic Transition in order to point out the high significance of the diverse and partly contradictory processes. As a macro-societal process, the SDT first of all comprises a decreasing fertility in absolute and relative terms below replacement level, an ageing of society, a postponement or complete resignation of marriage and parenthood, decisive changes in household structures as well as an increased importance of migration. The underlying behaviour patterns are mainly explained with fundamental changes of value orientations towards post-materialism and individualism. The concept was developed in the 1980s (van de Kaa, 1987) and meanwhile represents an established, though not undisputed, theoretical framework for explaining the manifold changes of the relations between societal processes, biographical decisions of individuals in the course of their lives, and household structures adapted to concrete situations (Lesthaeghe, 1995; van de Kaa, 2004). Both its claims of being decisively new (other scholars evaluate the changes rather as a continuation of the First Demographic Transition of the nineteenth century) and of being universal, or at least European, are questioned. Further criticisms were formulated with respect to the convergence assumption and the weak theoretical foundations of the concept (for an overview, see Sobotka *et al.*, 2003, pp. 254–255; Coleman, 2004). However, even by these demographers, the SDT is respected as 'undoubtedly the theory of the decade' (Coleman, 2004, p. 11) the limited coverage of which, with respect to time and space, needs to be taken into account.

While the discussions about the SDT, its range and limits are more or less restricted to demographers, its consequences become increasingly important in other disciplines. From the point of view of urban studies, the 'rapid evolution in household structures in the countries of the developed world' (Ogden and Hall, 2004, p. 88) in the final decades of the twentieth century is the most interesting feature related to the SDT debate. In this relatively short period, households have become significantly smaller in size and less stable since individuals shift from one living arrangement to another several times during their life course. Simultaneously, the number of 'non-traditional', 'non-complete' and non-family units and

in particular one-person households of different age has significantly increased (for an overview, see Buzar *et al.*, 2005).

It took quite a while before urban scholars recognized the significance of these fundamental changes for their own field of interest. Gober (1990, p. 237) convincingly argues that theories of residential location stuck for a very long time to the model of the nuclear family, thus providing only limited explanations for patterns of residential distribution. Myers (1990, p. 5) points to the 'mysterious separation' between housing and population studies and the long-term mutual disregard. To this day, the barriers between disciplines are high – Ogden and Hall (2004, p. 102) speak cautiously of the 'sometimes neglected' importance of the changing urban demography 'in the interpretation of the geography of social change'.

Despite the fact that more intense cross-disciplinary debates regarding field-specific theories, assumptions, concepts and methodologies are necessary, in the following we want to present one field of urban research where the mutual disregard was successfully overcome. The widespread renaissance of inner cities in Western Europe and eastern Germany in the past decades is a significant example of the interrelations between housing and demographic change, but also for common research efforts between geographers, sociologists and demographers. This case in point also provides a base for transferring urban demographic knowledge to ECE cities in the subsequent section to test the validity and appropriateness of existing hypotheses, conceptual approaches and models.

Renaissance of inner-city areas in Western Europe and eastern Germany: household-driven changes

After several decades of decline, many inner-city areas (functionally the zones of transition as typified by the Chicago School) have experienced decisive processes of change in many Western countries in the recent past. With respect to Western Europe, a huge body of research reports on remarkable transformations through processes of regeneration, gentrification and reurbanization (Gale, 1986; Lever, 1993; Ogden and Hall, 2000; Slater *et al.*, 2004; Atkinson and Bridge, 2005; Buzar *et al.*, 2005; Haase *et al.*, 2005b). It is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper to discuss these changes in detail. However, the rise of the 'new' household types characteristic of the SDT – in con-

nection with broader societal trends, such as increasing individualism, the prolongation of training periods prior to entry into the labour market, the higher participation of women in the labour force or the pluralization of lifestyles – has to be regarded as one of the most crucial preconditions for the renaissance of many inner cities in Western Europe and the subsequent emergence of a 'distinctive urban demography' (Ogden and Hall, 2000, p. 386). These neighbourhoods correspond, in particular, to the spatial, symbolic and housing demands of non-traditional household types such as younger singles, childless double-income couples or units of unrelated persons. The high attractiveness of the inner city is mainly provided by its specific building and housing structures (rarely hierarchic and sometimes even generous floor plans, the external appearance of built-up heritage, appreciated especially by better-off and younger middle-class households), the flexible mode of its usage (even in owner-occupied societies they are often for rent), its 'reinvention' and redefinition by trend-setters and developers, as well as its central location and proximity to manifold urban amenities. Public efforts and national as well as local regeneration schemes need finally to be mentioned as further preconditions for the renaissance of the inner city.

The most dramatic change of the inner cities as a result of the sudden influx of actors representing the new household types was to be observed, however, in the east German cities. Despite the fact that eastern Germany in effect belongs to the post-socialist transition societies, it is hardly recognized as such. Due to the specific conditions of German reunification and the rapid transfer of institutions and economic capital, inner cities – as in other socialist countries consciously neglected during the post-war period – experienced a supply-side driven regeneration. This process led until the end of the 1990s to a rapid increase in the restoration level but was still accompanied by ongoing population decline (for Leipzig, see Steinführer, 2006). The authors of the first major study concerning residential segregation in eastern Germany spoke, even in the late 1990s, of a 'split' gentrification (Harth *et al.*, 1998, pp. 177–178), meaning that a certain high-quality segment of the housing market was offered but did not have sufficient demand due to a lack of respective customers. Meanwhile, the framework conditions have changed. On the one hand, east German housing markets are characterized by a massive oversupply (Glock and Häußermann, 2004; Oswalt, 2004). On the other

hand, and especially in bigger university towns, there is an increased demand for high-quality housing in central locations. With about 500 000 inhabitants, Leipzig belongs to this group of cities. After a dramatic population loss of about 100 000 inhabitants in less than a decade due to negative natural and migration balances (the latter mainly caused by massive out-migration to the suburban hinterland and to western Germany during the early transition period), the core city has been stabilizing from the late 1990s onwards. Several districts in the first concentric zone beyond the city centre (characterized by late nineteenth-century building stock from the so-called *Gründerzeit* in a predominantly good state of repair) are currently experiencing a tendency towards reurbanization (Haase *et al.*, 2005a). These inner-city areas attract in particular younger and typical SDT households – mainly one-person households and units of unrelated others (*Wohngemeinschaften*), often established by university students. In some neighbourhoods, the youth rate meanwhile outweighs the elderly rate, which is rather untypical for a society that in general faces ageing and population decline. In all inner-city districts, the proportion of inhabitants between 20 and 30 years of age is above 15%, in most cases even above 20%, and hence higher than in all other parts of the town (data for 2002). A few areas which in recent years have developed into typical students' districts show signs of gentrification (such as a symbolic redefinition or an increasing number of pubs and student hang-outs), a process, though, which has to be coined as differing from standard Western models given the overall framework of oversupply (not shortage) in the Leipzig housing market. The impacts of demographic change will also in future serve as interesting research questions since there are signs of an 'aging in place' (Gober, 1990, p. 243) – new household types (families, well-off couples without children) are about to coin and consequently change the character (and housing prices) of some of these neighbourhoods.

While for this specific field of interest (inner cities) and the particular post-socialist development of eastern Germany, respectively, the overlapping between urban and demographic processes has already inspired several investigations (Brühl *et al.*, 2005; Haase *et al.*, 2005a; Opaschowski, 2005), the situation is completely different with respect to ECE. This argument will be elaborated in more detail in the following section, with specific respect to Poland and the Czech Republic.

Demographics don't matter: blind spots in post-socialist urban transition research

Despite the huge body of urban transition research in the past decade (as mentioned in the introduction), several questions are left open, often because they were simply not in the focus of research. A number of desiderata in the field of urban studies could be listed (e.g. the neglect of the transition paths of cities and towns at lower ranks of the urban hierarchy, the development of non-booming regions or the role of persistent patterns in housing market behaviour and socio-spatial structures). In addition – and this is of special interest in the argument of this paper – the change in demographic and household structures remained almost completely invisible. This is all the more astonishing, as demographers reported significant changes in micro-behaviour and macro-structures, such as rapidly and decisively declining birth rates, ageing, postponement of marriage and trends towards smaller households. Public debates concerning the general consequences of the changing demography for the welfare state, its social insurance systems and pension schemes, are *en vogue*. But sooner or later these processes will also impact upon the socio-spatial organization of the cities and the regional housing markets.

Rapid demographic change: a challenge for cities in ECE

The assumption that converging demographic patterns will be, in the long term, observed all over Europe is part of the theory of the SDT (van de Kaa, 2004, pp. 8–9). Hence, from 1990 onwards this conceptual frame was also applied to Eastern Europe. While demographic changes regarded as part of the SDT, mainly the falling birth rates, started at almost the same time as, or even earlier than, those in Western Europe, after 1989 all countries in transition experienced profound and sudden changes, particularly with respect to fertility behaviour (Kučera *et al.*, 2000; Rychtaříková, 2000, p. 89). The transformation of demographic patterns in ECE was much more rapid and dramatic than in Western countries – the Czech demographer Rychtaříková (2000) speaks of a demographic 'shock' (cf. Sobotka *et al.*, 2003, p. 259). Both Poland and the Czech Republic saw a dramatic decline in their total fertility rates: Poland by 33% from 1989 to 2000 (Kotowska, 2001, p. 52), the Czech Republic from 1.72 to 1.16 children per woman between 1992 and 1998 (or by

34%; Rychtaříková, 2000, p. 89). While this tendency was mainly due to postponement of child-bearing, further and interrelated demographic processes include deferred first marriages, rising numbers of children born out of wedlock and increasing divorce rates (cf. Kotowska, 2001, pp. 54–55; Sobotka *et al.*, 2003, p. 259). Whether these figures should in fact be interpreted as a verification of the all-embracing character of the SDT – hence whether ECE is indeed experiencing the SDT or not – is subject to a controversial debate among demographers (Rychtaříková, 1999; Sobotka *et al.*, 2003; Coleman, 2004). Although several population indicators signal similar trends as in Western and Northern Europe, the time span for a final assessment is still too short. Rychtaříková (1999, p. 28) interprets the rapid change in fertility behaviour rather as symptoms of post-socialist crisis than as an adaptation to Western models of rational choice (cf. also Kotowska, 2001, pp. 59–63). Sobotka *et al.* (2003) are more inclined to favour the SDT hypothesis.

However, with respect to the conceptual frame developed here, the answer to this question is somewhat subordinate. It is rather the consequences of these far-reaching changes which are of interest. They comprise, on the one hand, declining population numbers and an ageing of the society at a far higher level than previously expected. In this context, ageing processes are declared as the main challenges for the future (Vojtěchovská, 2000, p. 265). On the other hand, a diversification of household structures is to be expected and partly documented, leaving behind the almost universal pattern of early marriage and early family formation observed by the late 1980s (Sobotka *et al.*, 2003, pp. 258, 262–265). What is more, besides natural change mobility and migration patterns are transforming in ECE societies. Whereas rural–urban migration has been decreasing since the 1970s and has nearly ceased today, urban–rural migration is intensifying (partly in connection with suburbanization). Not least, international immigration is becoming a more decisive factor (Kotowska, 2001, pp. 63–64; Musil, 2002, pp. 304–309; Uherek, 2003; Ouředníček, this issue).

All of these interdependent, partly contradictory processes impact – immediately, in the mid- or long term, directly or mediated through housing markets – upon the cities. Both quantitative and qualitative signs of demographic change are already obvious today:

- Besides rapid urbanization in the metropolitan

regions, the Czech Republic and Poland have been facing declining population numbers in their bigger cities since 1990. Czech towns with more than 10 000 inhabitants annually lost on average 2–4% of their population between 1995 and 1999. For the big cities (100 000 inhabitants or more) this accounts for 10% in less than a decade, in most cases due to an excess of deaths over births (Musil, 2002, pp. 305–307). In Poland, the urban population decreased by 12% compared to the 1980s, a development that started in 1994, due mainly to suburbanization and declining birth rates. What is more, cities with more than 200 000 inhabitants show the most remarkable decrease in natural population growth of all urban settlements (Kupiszewski *et al.*, 1998, pp. 274, 288–289; Billert, 2004, p. 45; GUS, 2004, p. 15; Parysek, 2005, p. 101). While rapidly declining fertility figures and ageing are subjects of public debate, they are only rarely recognized in their significance for urban and housing market developments (some hints are given by Andriele, 2001; Musil, 2002, pp. 318–326, *passim*; Ślodziak, 2002; Markowski and Stawasz, 2003, p. 46). This contrasts with the lively debate on contemporary ‘shrinkage’ in (eastern) Germany (Oswald, 2004) which is certainly the reason why German researchers are in particular sensitized to the phenomenon of declining population numbers.

- Most promising – but rarely investigated – are the interactions between quantitative and qualitative changes in household structures on the one hand and urban developments on the other. Due to the SDT, household numbers (still) grow despite shrinking populations (Ogden and Hall, 2004, p. 101). This is also true for ECE countries. According to Czech census data, the number of households in the country increased between 1991 and 2001 (depending on the definition of household) by 3 to 6%. The long-term tendency of ever-smaller households continues (Bartoňová, 2003, p. 269). In Polish cities, the share of one-person households meanwhile reaches 30% on average, with the highest values in Warsaw and Łódź (38% and 35%, respectively; GUS, 2004, p. 56). Sobotka *et al.* (2003, pp. 262–265) demonstrate that behind these figures significant changes are going on in favour of more fluid and SDT-related arrangements. The ‘Czech society has gradually become tolerant towards certain forms of non-traditional family behaviour’ (Sobotka *et al.*, 2003, p. 259), hence

cohabitation, postponement of marriage and child-bearing as well as childlessness are to be observed much more often than before the transition period. All these households need accommodation – and this simple statement provides the basic conceptual link between demographic and urban issues of transition research on ECE countries. A further factor needs to be considered in this context. As societies with a large excess demand for dwellings and hence difficult entries of starter households in the housing market, forced cohabitation between family members of different generations (and even of unrelated others) is more likely to be the rule rather than the exception. In the course of transition, their number has even increased due to both demographic and housing market developments (Bartoňová, 2003, p. 269; Sobotka *et al.*, 2003, p. 262; Steinführer, 2004, pp. 153–154).

When summing up these rather fragmented findings, it becomes obvious that there are a number of open research questions in the frame of a ‘housing demography’ for ECE countries. Disciplinary demographic research provides strong arguments for the consideration of both quantitative and qualitative changes, especially at the household level, also by urban scholars, going beyond macro-statistics. Set against this background, in the following section, inner cities in ECE will serve as an example for deliberating these issues further, since these areas resemble – structurally and functionally – their West European counterparts.

Post-socialist transition and inner-city development in ECE

As in Western Europe and eastern Germany, also inner-city areas in ECE developed historically as working- or middle-class neighbourhoods. They were and are important for the urban viability and local identity (Murzyn, 2004, pp. 258–259). Their physical structure is diverse, ranging from very simple to valuable housing stock. Following the Second World War, many inner-city areas in Poland and Czechoslovakia had lost their traditional population – especially Jewish and German residents – and needed to be resettled (Schlögel, 2005, p. 56). In the following decades, the inner city was incorporated into the social geography of the emerging socialist city. Large dwellings were usually subdivided, and a mixture of population lived there. Due to the accelerating dilapidation of the

housing stock in the 1970s and 1980s, most inner cities underwent stepwise downgrading processes, while the number of uninhabitable flats increased. By the late 1980s, mainly elderly people and partly ethnic minorities such as Romanians lived there (Matějuš *et al.*, 1979, p. 184; for the case of Budapest, but transferable to some cities in Czechoslovakia, see Ladányi, 1993).

Post-socialist transition meant for these areas, first of all, far-reaching changes in ownership and tenure structures (Lowe, 2003; Billert, 2004, pp. 46–47; Sýkora, 2005, pp. 100–102). Restitution, subsequent transfers to professional owners and the privatization of dwellings to sitting tenants had ambivalent consequences: both change and persistence of the social and demographic structures are to be found currently (for the example of Brno, see Steinführer, 2006). Due to their industrial past and current transit function to the suburban hinterland, the state of the residential environment usually remained poor, despite the improvements in the overall ecological situation (Mikulík and Vaishar, 1996). Deindustrialization led to land-use changes, commercial vacancies and the development of brownfields (for Łódź, see Liszewski and Young, 1997; Riley *et al.*, 1999).

But urban research – more occupied with highly visible processes such as suburbanization and its spatial consequences (see, e.g., Ouředníček’s and Leetmaa and Tammaru’s articles in this issue) – rarely took notice of inner-city areas. In those cases where the inner city is indeed the focus of research, the centre of attention tends to fall on the more extreme instances of spatial change, such as luxury renovations, gentrification, the entry of Western foreigners, physical decline, ethnic transformation or the ‘reinvention’ of former Jewish quarters (Ladányi, 1993; Więclaw, 1997; Lorens, 2005, p. 47; Murzyn, 2005; Parysek, 2005, pp. 109–111; Sýkora, 2005). Insular upgrading processes in the inner cities – already visible through shopping centres, specific retail and cultural offerings – are identified as an expression of a growing variety of lifestyles and housing carriers (Sýkora, 2005, p. 104), although they are not, up until the present, equivalent alternatives to the prevailing suburbanization tendencies. As for the previous situation, there are signs that the partial resurgence of inner-city areas in ECE is not primarily linked to positive sentiments towards these neighbourhoods, but instead to a ‘utilitarian demand for housing in convenient and pleasant locations close to the places of work for professional elites’ (*ibid.*, p. 105). Decisively

influenced by international developers (and their perceptions of attractive housing), gentrification-like processes are appearing at various levels, at least in the capital cities (for a clear example, see Badyina and Golubchikov, 2005).

In this vein, most inner cities in ECE appear, in contrast with more dynamic urban areas, as the stagnating poles of development with only 'islands of dynamic revitalization' (Sýkora *et al.*, 2000, p. 68). Nevertheless, they are supposed to face a future of 'qualitative growth' (Parysek, 2005, p. 113). Already, the existing small body of studies concerning less spectacular inner-city areas has confirmed that they are by no means stagnating. On the contrary, micro- and meso-scale analyses prove that household structures as well as age and tenure compositions have changed in recent years (Kipta, 1995; Vaishar and Zapletalová, 2003; Węclawowicz, 2003, pp. 91–117; Steinführer, 2004, pp. 292–303). Also quantitatively, the inner city is in a constant though not always apparent transformation. Sýkora (2005, p. 94) reports that in some districts of inner Prague the number of inhabitants decreased by one-fifth between 1991 and 2001. The most important reason is certainly the process of commercialization which led to a decline in the number of dwellings in these central parts and was particularly influential in the case of Prague. The core city of Brno (the second largest town in the Czech Republic) lost 11% of its inhabitants in the same period (Steinführer, 2004, p. 253). Since suburbanization is the most important process of urban change in either city, one has to expect that – besides commercialization – the increased housing mobility to the urban periphery also accounts for this development. Other influential processes are, however, of a demographic nature: ageing and, most likely as well, the change in household structures. Nevertheless, concerning this socio-demographic transformation, almost no knowledge is available and only highlights can be presented at the current state of research. For two inner-city areas in Brno, for example, it was found in 2000 that these areas are still prevalently family neighbourhoods (40% families with dependent children and 6% one-parent households), but evidence was also found with respect to the above mentioned 'forced' cohabitations. There were 8% family households with adult children and 9% households of either non-related residents or of people of second-degree relatedness (e.g. elderly people and their grandchildren; Steinführer, 2004, pp. 153–154). Every sixth household in the inner city might therefore be in-

terpreted as such a forced, non-traditional cohabitation which does not allow its members a 'free' decision concerning their residential location.

By way of a conclusion, one has to stress that in the debate on inner-city change in ECE, demographic issues have remained almost completely invisible. Even sufficient knowledge regarding basic population features – and therefore probable changes – in these neighbourhoods is lacking. One might assume qualitative changes not detected thus far. Subsequently, questions such as how the post-socialist transition is reflected by small-scale demographic structures and household compositions are increasingly moving into the spotlight. Are recent changes exhibiting similar patterns such as those in West European countries or in eastern Germany? Will the historically affluent areas move in the direction of a 'yuppification'? Are there alternatives to displacement and social polarization? For which household types, socio-cultural groups and generations are these neighbourhoods attractive? Who can and who wants to afford to live there? What role are generational change and ageing playing?

Hence, quantitative and qualitative changes of household structures and their consequences for urban structures and housing markets could be one concern of future urban research with respect to post-socialist cities. On a smaller scale, the impact of these overall tendencies on inner-city neighbourhoods, housing strategies, intentions and actual behaviour of their residents merit ample attention. In this context, processes of new occupancy and displacement have to be taken into account. Key groups of actors (residents, owners) need to be identified and their interests, intentions and real behaviour explained. Finally, single case studies have to be placed in broader contexts in order to elaborate which trends are, on the one hand, specific to a certain town and which, on the other, represent more general patterns of urban development under the conditions of transition and demographic change. This will necessarily include explicit references to European patterns of urban development when applying and questioning the concept of the European city in a true sense of the word, that is, not restricted to West European agglomerations.

Methodological issues: transfer of knowledge and cross-cultural comparison

Most of the aforementioned concepts of urban research as well as the theory of SDT were developed on the basis of trends observed in Western Europe.

Therefore, they have to be questioned in their relevance for and applicability to ECE. Both transfer of knowledge and cross-cultural comparison have decisive methodological implications, some of which will be discussed here.

Generally, theories – be it in urban, housing or demographic research – are founded on an implicit or even explicit convergence claim, i.e. on the assumption that certain societal trends will gradually develop (at least) Europe-wide. The SDT theory is one prominent example in this context, although one of its founders recently pointed out that ‘rapid convergence is ... unlikely’ (van de Kaa, 2004, p. 8). However, in the long run, converging patterns of demographic behaviour are expected (Van de Kaa, 2004, pp. 8–9; Kühne, 2000, p. 883). By now, however, the progression of the SDT in ECE differs significantly from the generalized scheme of stages developed by van de Kaa (1987), first and foremost because the logic of the process is strongly determined by both historical and institutional, country-specific, contexts (Sobotka *et al.*, 2003, p. 271; Coleman, 2004, pp. 14–17). Beyond ‘shock’ reactions, demographers also point to persistent behavioural patterns, such as the lower mean age at the time of first child-bearing and marriage (Rychtaříková, 1999, pp. 22, 31). The same holds true for theories and models in post-socialist urban research, not least due to the fact that transition does not equally and simultaneously impact upon all levels and sectors of society. Moreover, it cannot be restricted to change (for a typology of transition patterns, see Steinführer, 2006). For example, housing markets or segregation patterns have not changed as rapidly as expected at the onset of post-socialist transition. Lowe (2003, p. xix) even concludes with respect to the housing sector ‘that most of these countries [in East and Central Europe] have become less like their neighbours in North and West Europe over the last ten years or so’ – hence even divergence might be the result of transition.

However, our general starting point is that ‘Western’ concepts and experience both from Western Europe and the specific transition case of eastern Germany do have a heuristic value for research on ECE and may be applied in framing theoretical approaches and empirical questions. In many respects, ECE cities have become more similar to cities in Western Europe in the recent past, a fact that is confirmed both by Czech and Polish authors (Sobotka *et al.*, 2003, p. 271; Parysek, 2005, p. 109). But a simple transfer of Western ‘textbook’

concepts would be too easy, little target-oriented and scientifically unacceptable.

What is more, cross-cultural comparison does not simply mean a one-way transfer of knowledge. Research about housing demographics in ECE (inner) cities will expand the European debate and provide new insights into the more general relationship between demographic and urban changes. Comparisons are *a priori* neither appropriate nor inappropriate; they simply depend on the underlying questions (Burawoy, 1999, p. 305). Eastern cities and their surrounding regions should be viewed within the context of the polarized urban developments in Europe, with dynamic metropolises on the one hand and declining old industrial regions on the other. Migration and mobility between these two poles – and hence the demographic developments within them – already differ significantly today (Kühne, 2000, pp. 882–883; Musil, 2002, p. 319). In the medium term, both poles have to come to terms with the local consequences of the SDT as outlined above, including the impacts upon the social, spatial and housing market structures. Therefore, a critical reflection on the experiences of Western Europe (and, as a specific case, of eastern Germany) is expected to be of key importance for a better understanding of the developments in ECE which are currently concealed by the prevailing paradigm and conceptual framework of post-socialist transition. In this light, the paucity of East–West comparative studies is striking. In this context, both similar and contrasting cases are worth comparing (for Manchester and Łódź, see Liszewski and Young, 1997; for Leipzig and Brno, Steinführer, 2004, 2006). In particular the east German case – despite or probably even because of its specifics – could be a contrasting example worth analysing from the ECE perspective, not least because the starting position of the different societies in the region (including the DDR/GDR) in 1989/1990 was far more similar than is often recognized today. The development which cities in eastern Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia underwent during the decades after the Second World War up until 1989 led to a range of similar structures concerning the social and economic situation, the state of the built urban heritage and the housing stock. Therefore, it seems to be reasonable to relate current and future developments in ECE to processes that have occurred in eastern Germany over the past few decades. By now, the emergence of similar demographic processes in urban agglomerations of ECE has only rarely been recognized in the scientific

discourse (Andrle, 2001; Musil, 2002, *passim*; Rieniets, 2004, p. 33). The assumption that eastern Germany may be regarded as a forerunner for similar demographic trends – and therefore, in the medium and long term, for respective urban developments – in its neighbouring societies serves as a fruitful hypothesis for future research (Hannemann *et al.*, 2002). Subsequently, it is promising to scrutinize both the potentials and limitations involved in cross-analysing Western, east German and ECE evidence of demographic and household changes in inner cities in order to come closer to an integrated approach.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that the focus in research on the post-socialist city should stretch beyond the dimension of post-socialism, even if transition still represents an important explanatory framework for the analysis of currently observable processes and future trends. Instead, these societies should be seen as needing to confront many of the challenges faced by West European countries. Applying the example of demographic change, it was suggested that combining a transition-related perspective with a broader European one may generate new research questions and, hopefully, innovative and mutually enriching theoretical insights. In this manner, we have aspired to emphasize the importance of embracing several strands of the scientific debate within transition, demographic, housing and urban research. This includes the salient issue of the specifics of the East European or post-socialist transition on the one hand, and the more general European patterns on the other.

The focus on the housing demography of inner-city areas may be attributed to two primary reasons: first, to its significant role in the process of neighbourhood change in Western Europe and eastern Germany during the past few decades, and second, to the neglect of these urban structures in transition research. By now, post-socialist transition has brought about rather fragmented insights of contradictory developments with respect to both the social composition (social mixture vs. polarization, ageing vs. gentrification) and the physical structures (privatization for sitting tenants vs. vacancies, decline of building stock vs. luxury renovation) of these areas. At present, the question of how these old built-up areas will develop in the future is virtually open-ended. It will depend, in any case, on the condition of (consolidating) post-socialist own-

ership structures, economic developments, local and national circumstances, the constellation and interests of the actors involved and – being the focus here – on broader trends of demographic and household changes.

In methodological terms, ‘Western’ concepts of urban development (such as gentrification or reurbanization) and demographics (SDT) provide a fruitful base for further theorization and investigation of the housing demography of inner cities in ECE. However, their validity and applicability will again vary depending on the site-specific contexts of prospering (‘growing’) agglomerations on the one hand and declining (‘shrinking’) city regions on the other. Put differently, a comparative perspective and truly European perspective is indispensable in order to broaden our knowledge on urban demographics, both in the theoretical and in the empirical sense.

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Notes

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