

Transitory urbanites: new actors of residential change in Polish and Czech inner cities

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Inner cities in East Central Europe (ECE) were for many decades characterized by population losses, ageing and physical dilapidation. Some recent research, however, reports on refurbishment, in-migration, spot gentrification and rejuvenation – processes that counteract the traditional story of decline. To grasp the real dynamics and ambivalences of this change, one has to go to the actor level.

In our interview-based research in Polish and Czech second-order cities, we found a group of actors that we regard as key in inner-city residential change. Up to date, however, they remain hidden to the official statistics and, thus, from most research. They are students or younger professionals forming one-person households or cohabiting couples who chose the inner city as a temporary place to live which is appropriate for their current phase of life. They do not expect to stay there for good and either explicitly plan to move to a single family home in suburbia in future or leave this decision open. According to these characteristics, we call them *transitory urbanites*. Their attitude towards inner-city housing oscillates between the preference for central living and pragmatism.

In our paper, we ask for the role of these transitory urbanites for inner cities in ECE. Which consequences does their presence have for the areas? Are they simply contributing to (future) gentrification or how can we best call the processes they are pushing forward? To discuss these questions, we present findings from on-site research in Łódź, Gdańsk, Brno and Ostrava from between 2006 and 2009.

Social upgrading of inner-city neighborhoods in Central and Eastern European metropolises? Changes of socio-spatial patterns in five urban regions

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Since 1990 urban regions in CEE-countries have faced profound changing, asking the socialist socio-spatial patterns of the cities and the functioning of the urban community. The diversification of the local housing markets in terms of various new housing constructions provokes the differentiation of the peoples living ideals and preferences. The liberalization of the markets induced an increasing residential mobility within the urban regions and changed social-spatial patterns.

Especially, the historic city-centers of the CEE-urban regions seem to be one of the focal points of these manifold social and spatial changes. Given the efforts of restoration and business revitalization, the historic city centers have experienced an important constructional and functional upgrading since the late 1990ties. Besides the enormous interest of different private enterprises and public authorities, the city centres are increasingly taken into account by the people's choice of residence. Hence, does this structural upgrading go hand in hand with social upgrading? What similarities and differences can be revealed for the inner-city developments of CEE-urban regions?

The paper compares the current socio-spatial patterns of inner-city neighborhoods in CEE-cities (Budapest, Vilnius, Sofia, St. Petersburg, Leipzig), arguing to what extent social upgrading occurs. Focusing on residential mobility/persistency as well as on the socio-economic characteristics and living preferences of the residents, the term of gentrification is partially questioned for the CEE-urban context. The paper is based on results of an ongoing DFG-research project.

Marginal Groups in Central Places: Gentrification, Property Rights and Post-Socialist Primitive Accumulation (Bucharest, Romania)

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Various studies described that many cities and central areas in Eastern and Central Europe underwent gentrification. Based on a census of a centrally located area (N=2965 households) and interviews with real estate agents carried out in early 2000s I describe such transformations in Bucharest, Romania. The results suggest that gentrification in Eastern Europe involves the state as much as it involves the market. Gentrification functions as a process of primitive accumulation, whereby capital is mobilized easily, following the state allocation of valuable properties at prices well below the market. The findings indicate that gentrification takes place in small enclaves rather than uniformly across the area. Real estate agents, former owners who regained state confiscated housing, politically powerful residents and families who take quasi-kinship roles toward their elderly neighbors, function as gentrifiers. Six strategies of appropriating the market value through the relocation of financially disadvantaged residents are described.

Industrial sites and marginalization of the working class in Kyiv

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This year with a group of BA and MA students we engaged in a sociological research on the place of industrial sites in Kyiv, focusing on two plants as case studies. We chose “Arsenal” and “Bilshovyk” – two of the oldest, biggest and most well-known plants in Kyiv. They are conveniently located in the central parts of the city and during Soviet days were presented as symbols of industrial potential, marking the central place of the working-class. However, during the economic downturn of the 1990s both plants faced severe economic problems and decreased the numbers of workers by more than ten times. Much of the territory was sold or rented private investors and many are convinced that there is no place for such big industrial sites in the city centre and that they should be turned into shopping malls or offices for business. In fact, part of the territory of “Bilshovyk” has been already sold off and turned into one of the largest shopping malls in Kyiv. Soviet symbolism is used as a marketing strategy to attract clients (a Bolshevik soldier carrying a large red shopping-bag). However, we are speaking here not only of industrial sites, but also of workers who used to work at these plants and who are also marginalized as “remnants of socialism” who “failed to adapt to new realities”. Development, aimed at replacement of sites of production by sites of consumption also testifies to a change in ideology, where the central role is played no longer by the workers, but by the so-called “middle classes”.

Therefore, in this paper we will touch the questions of the fate of working-class sites in post-socialist cities, economic and symbolic marginalization of workers, commercialization of "socialist" heritage, weakness of workers' resistance to the market economy, and alternatives for the re-development of working-class areas to address workers' needs.

We will describe the processes of marginalization of industrial work and workers in post-soviet cities, both socio-economic (low wages, bankruptcy of the plants), spacial (no place for plants in the capital city) and symbolic (workers replaced by middle-class as a key social group, consumption instead of production).