

East Central European Inner Cities Facing Demographic Change: Comparative Analyses in Polish and Czech cities for the Transition Period

Dr Annegret Haase (i)

Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research-UFZ
Department of Urban and Environmental Sociology
Permoserstr 15
04318 Leipzig
Germany

Tel: + 49 341 2353234
Email: annegret.haase@ufz.de

Co-Authors: Annett Steinführer, Sigrun Kabisch, Dariusz Gierczak (Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ, Leipzig)

ABSTRACT

Cities in East Central Europe (ECE) have been facing profound quantitative and qualitative demographic changes since the 1990s. Declining birth rates, ageing, changing household compositions and consequences of inter- and intraregional mobility impact on the development of urban agglomerations bringing about far-reaching impact on the cities and their functional, socio-spatial and housing market structures.

Set against this background, our paper focuses on the nexus of demographic change and housing in inner-city residential areas in ECE cities. Using the example of Polish and Czech cities, it analyses whether demographic shifts are already mirrored in the social composition of the areas. A special focus are non-traditional household types (singles, cohabiting couples or unrelated adults sharing a flat) since it is well-known from “Western” research that inner-city areas are in particular appropriate for these households because of their built fabric, central location and the variety of urban amenities. Accordingly, many neighbourhoods in West European core cities experienced profound physical, symbolic and social changes in the past decades. By contrast, many inner-city areas in Poland and the Czech Republic have been in a process of long-term decay for several decades. After 1990, small-scale regeneration is intertwined with further neglect, decline and insular luxury renovation. Housing markets are characterised by strong internal barriers, low mobility as well as complicated restitution and property changes. Research has to prove whether current demographic and social change already leads to structural shifts in the urban space brought about by “residential” impact, i.e. to “neighbourhood careers” of segregation, up-grading or decline, or if it is likely to do so in the near future.

Empirical evidence from different cities – Gdańsk, Łódź, Brno und Ostrava – will be presented, drawing on census and municipal data. The theoretical body of knowledge of postsocialist transition research is amplified by considering the hitherto under-researched field of housing demography. As a result, the complex shape and path dependencies of demographic and household development in ECE inner cities are to be identified and set into relation with experiences from Western Europe.

The paper draws on research carried out within the international project titled “Socio-spatial consequences of demographic change for East Central European cities” sponsored by the German VolkswagenStiftung from 2006 to 2009.

Key Words: East Central Europe, inner city, demographic change