

ARE SHRINKING CITIES A COMPLETELY NEW PHENOMENON IN POST-SOCIALIST SPACE? URBAN SHRINKAGE IN EASTERN EUROPE BEFORE AND DURING SOCIALISM

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ABSTRACT

Shrinking cities present the prevalent type of present-day urbanisation in post-socialist countries in the eastern half of Europe. The outspread and the socialism-related features of their shrinkage have made them a compelling topic for scholars internationally. Thus, they are well-documented today. However, this straight focus of researchers on post-socialist shrinking cities has somehow formed the opinion that this phenomenon is completely new for this region. If such research is oriented to the past of urbanisation in this part of Europe, it usually examines the causes of post-socialist urban shrinkage originated in the specificities of socialism. Nevertheless, urban shrinkage existed in the eastern half of Europe before the fall of socialism. Concrete data covers the examples of shrinking cities in inter-war (pre-socialist) and post-war (socialist) periods. Although these cities were not very frequent, they represent the predecessors of many shrinking cities in this part of Europe today. They can even be categorised by the various factors that were crucial for their shrinkage: change of borders, fall of industrial production, internal/national spatial planning policies or the loss of dependent area. The aim of this research is to systematise this knowledge relating pre-socialist and socialist urban shrinkage in Eastern Europe. Hence, this paper is organised as a scientific review, with a special intention to present the different categories of affected cities. In that way, this paper contributes to the further understanding of the circumstances that have provoked urban shrinkage to be so widespread in this part of Europe.

KEYWORDS _ *shrinking cities, Eastern Europe, socialism, pre-socialism, urban development, border cities, deindustrialised cities*

INTRODUCTION – POST-SOCIALIST URBAN SHRINKAGE

Shrinking cities present the prevalent type of present-day urbanisation in post-socialist countries in the central-eastern, eastern and south-eastern regions of Europe. The process of widespread and rapid urban shrinkage in this region started with the collapse of socialist system in the early 1990s. Just one decade after, in the early 2000s, more than 82% major cities in post-socialist European countries were shrinking. This was twice more than an average for the whole continent (Turok and Mykhnenko, 2007). The process of urban shrinkage is persistently widespread even today. The recent report done by the World Bank summarises that more than half of cities in the former socialist space were demographically declining in 2010s. This percentage is more severe by excluding

Central Asia. In this constellation, post-socialist countries in Europe have more than 70% of cities with shrinking patterns. The 'recorders' are Romania and Bulgaria where more than 90% of cities are losing population (Restrepo Cadavid et al, 2017). To conclude, urban shrinkage in post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe is the most acute among all world regions.

Why shrinking cities in Eastern Europe are so unique? A. Haase, D. Rink and K. Grossmann (2016) point out that the (post)-socialist character of these cities is exactly the main feature that defines the uniqueness of their shrinkage. This means that the patterns of urbanisation during socialism and after its collapse have left so immense influence on the cities in this region that it is a key determinant to differentiate post-socialist shrinking cities as a type within the global discourse relating urban shrinkage (Batunova, 2015). In brief, aside of globally well-known shrinking problems in economic and demographic sphere, post-socialist shrinking cities possess the further burden based on the fast and weakly controlled change of political and economic systems. The transformation of the former socialist countries from one-party systems with planned economy to multi-party democracies with market and capitalist economy has had a deep negative impact on their cities, urban economy and urban government (Strykiewicz et al, 2012).

The explained outspread and the socialism-related features of urban shrinkage in cities in Eastern Europe have made the straight focus of researchers on them. This situation has somehow formed the general opinion that this phenomenon is completely new for this region. If such research is oriented to the past of urbanisation in this part of Europe, it usually examines the causes of post-socialist urban shrinkage originated in the specificities of socialism. Nevertheless, urban shrinkage existed in the eastern half of Europe before the fall of socialism. However, the present-day known construct Eastern Europe did not exist before 1945 (Gutkind, 1972), which significantly complicates the research of pre-socialist urbanisation in this region as an entity.

Although shrinking cities before and during socialism were not very frequent, they represent the predecessors of many shrinking cities in this part of Europe today. They can even be categorised by the still valid factors that were crucial for their shrinkage: change of borders, fall of industrial production, internal/national spatial planning policies or the loss of dependent area. The aim of this research is to systematise this knowledge relating pre-socialist and socialist urban shrinkage in Eastern Europe. In that way, this paper contributes to the further understanding of the circumstances that have provoked the current urban shrinkage to be so widespread in Eastern Europe.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is organised as a scientific review, with a special intention to present the different categories of affected shrinking cities. Categorisation is divided in two parts: inter-war (pre-socialist) and post-war (socialist) period. Each type of a shrinking city is demonstrated through a showcase(s). Before this illustration through showcases, historic circumstances and their influence on urbanisation and urban shrinkage are explained in brief. All extracted types of shrinking cities from both periods are discussed together in final conclusions, to clarify ongoing situation about urban shrinkage in Eastern/post-socialist Europe.

URBAN SHRINKAGE IN EASTERN EUROPE BEFORE SOCIALISM

Urbanisation in Eastern Europe has had a different pace than at the west of the continent from its early beginnings. Western part has been always more developed and the main historic powers were there (Musterd & Kovács, 2013). Hence, Eastern Europe had postponed urbanisation, as well as the relatively late development of capitalist economy and modern society (Musil, 2005). The same pattern was followed in industrial revolution, which reached Eastern Europe in the second half of 19th century, i.e. one century after its start in England (Clossick, 2014). Despite its late initiation, the industrialisation on the turn of 19th to 20th century of Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, which

covered the most of Eastern Europe, was very rapid, enabling their fast economic development and urbanisation. The economic and demographic growth of cities as the centres of industrialisation was great in both empires, but also followed with uncontrolled construction, substandard housing and the rise of social inequalities (Berenger, 1997).

After the World War I (WWI), the simply organised political space of Eastern Europe, mainly divided between three empires, German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian, was profoundly reconfigured; these empires were collapsed and many national states were born (Boeckh, 2014). New states had much smaller space and a lot of new borderland thereof. The new borders further cut many previous trade routes and divided former markets and gravitation zones. This consequently left many East-European cities and towns in an unenviable position and brought economic obstacles, which was reflected through demographic stagnation or decline.

Type 1a: New border cities

Some cities began to shrink due to their physical proximity to new borders. Some of them even became border cities or new twin cities, i.e. the cities divided by border.

The first presented case is Sopron in present-day western Hungary. The city was the historic seat of western Hungarian lands, today organised within the eastern Austrian Province of Burgenland. In contrast to the rest of these lands, mainly inhabited with Germans, Sopron became a city with dominantly Hungarian-speaking population, as a consequence of the fast urban growth due to industrialisation during late Austro-Hungarian period. After the WWI, newly-created Austria and Hungary were demarked along ethnic lines. The city was left to Hungary, but in the form of a 'pocket' mostly surrounded by Austrian territory (Beigbeder, 1994). This border location and the dwarfed gravitation zone of few villages hindered the development of Sopron; the city stalled and, after the WWII, entered four-decade long urban decline when nearby border with Austria was an "Iron Curtain" (Sik, 2015).



_ Fig. 1: Unplanned twin cities – View on Esztergom Basilica in Hungary across the Danube River from Štúrovo/Párkány in Slovakia (author: B. Antonić)

Even more severe destiny stricken the cities divided by new borders, such as the former Hungarian royal city of Esztergom on the middle Danube (Fig. 1). The river became a border between Hungary and Czechoslovakia at the end of 1918. The core of the city was assigned to Hungary, while its northern suburb of Párkány across the Danube was inaugurated by Czechoslovak authorities as the Town of Štúrovo. The both urban settlements have passed through the periods of stagnation and shrinkage since this division. Only after both Hungary and Slovakia entered EU Schengen area in 2003, the situation between two cities relaxed.

Type 1b: Industrial hubs with reduced market

The second type of the shrinking cities and towns made during the interwar period is also related to

new borders, but in different way. Newly-established countries outlined their own national markets, usually much smaller than the previous ones of three huge imperial powers. For example, many Finnish and Polish cities belonged to the most western and the most developed part of vast Russian Empire and their industrial products prevailed there; their early industrialisation in the second half of 19th century (comparing to the other parts of Imperial Russia) was definitely initiated and led by this huge and underused market (Branch et al, 1995). Riga, the capital of newly-established Latvia, was an interesting case; it compensated its role as the main Baltic port of the former empire with the new functions of a capital city (Morawski, 2017). However, many cities could not find the right solution for this gap in local economy. The City of Łódź in Poland was illustrative for this situation. This city was the most western major city of Russian Empire, developed mainly between the abolition of serfdom in 1861 and the start of the WWI in 1914. This can easily be presented through demographic growth – from 13,000 in 1840 to approximately 600,000 in 1915. Łódź was known as a “Polish Manchester” due to its advanced textile industry (Fleming, 2012). However, city entered urban shrinkage after the WWI and the city recovery lasted till the WWII. After the war, Łódź grew slowly comparing the other cities in Communist Poland. Finally, after the fall of communism in the early 1990s, the city founded it in an even more acute position that after the WWI due to the complete collapse of local industry. This has been followed by population decline (-20%), as well as the other forms of urban shrinkage (Fig. 2) since that (Holm et al, 2015).



_ Fig. 2: The visibility of urban shrinkage in present-day Łódź in Poland on street (author: B. Antoni \acute{c})

Type 1c: Former imperial cities

The third interwar type is well-documented, because it refers to two large imperial capitals that lost their significance with the decomposition of their vast empires: St. Petersburg and Vienna. However, their urban shrinkage had noticeable differences.

Vienna was the capital of long-lasting Habsburg Monarchy that transformed itself into dual Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867. This year is approximately the outset of industrial era of this empire, which was reflected in its fast urbanisation, too. Vienna exemplified this development. The city population quadrupled from 1850 to 1910, passing remarkable two-million threshold at the last imperial census in 1910 (Berenger, 1997). Although Vienna preserved its position of a capital after the WWI, new Austrian Republics was incomparably smaller than the former Monarchy. This was immediately observable in the city demographics; Vienna lost approximately 10% of population after the war. Then, the city had a peripheral position in Austria, close to national borders to Czechoslovakia (east and northeast) and Hungary (southeast). This precipitated much smaller gravitation zone than previous, especially after the WWII, when these borders became an “Iron Curtain” between the West and the East. The post-WWII urban shrinkage of Vienna lasted several decades. The reurbanisation of the city started only after the opening of the borders in 1990 and after the launching of the mass reconstruction of old building stock in the 1980s (Fig. 3) (AW, 2008).



_ Fig. 3: Reconstructed building in central Vienna, Austria, as a role-model for the city regeneration in the 1980s and 1990s and reurbanisation thereof (author: B. Antonić)

The developmental trajectory of St. Petersburg, the capital of Imperial Russia, was unique. The city lost the most of its western gravitation zone in Finland and Estonia, as well as the role of national capital in favour of centrally located Moscow. The city lost almost 40% between the censuses in 1910 and 1920, but this was overcome by reurbanisation within the socialist mass-industrialisation of the early USSR (Eliseeva & Gribova, 2003). The planned economy in the USSR prevented the scenario seen in the case of Vienna.

URBAN SHRINKAGE IN EASTERN EUROPE DURING SOCIALISM

One of the main premises of socialist urbanisation is the controlled development and growth of cities as the hubs of the constant development of industry and the enlightenment of proletariat (Enyedi, 1998). The exemptions from this 'canon' were rare. They were neglected in contemporary scientific sources, too. Yet, shrinking cities existed in a small proportion in all censuses in the post-war USSR (Cottineau, 2016). On the other hand, there were the relatively numerous examples of the cities with very slow growth due to the planned measures of the deconcentration of urban population. An example is the deliberate demographic slowdown of Prague and Budapest after the WWII in favour of secondary cities in socialist Czechoslovakia and Hungary (Musil, 2005). Similar measures were taken in the USSR, but with more modest outcomes. In addition, shrinking cities during socialism were often somewhat opposite to the typical model of a socialist city. Three cases of socialist shrinking cities can be signed out.

Type 2a: Border cities

The first interwar type – shrinking cities close to and thereby isolated by national borders – got its post-war replica. They were more often in the socialist countries with slower demographic growth. Then, the location of such declining cities was somewhat different, because they prevailed along "hard" borders, like "Iron Curtain". For instance, many small cities in the westernmost Czechoslovakia, along the border with its 'problematic' neighbour, Western Germany, were shrinking during socialism due to this unwanted location (Musil, 2005). The most of them were ethnically German before the WWII, so the border issue was not very visible during interwar years. The case of the Town of Aš, situated in Czech semi-enclave surrounded by German territory, was more than useful. The town lost almost the half of its interwar population during socialism. Finally, the town population stabilised after the 1990s (ČSU, 2007).

Type 2b: Shrinking towns due to spatial isolation

The second post-war type is a bit ambiguous, because it is strictly reserved to small historic cities and towns without a real industrial base. They are formed and have existed as trade and service centres for their rural surroundings. Thus, it is questionable if they can count as modern urban settlements in their essence. Nevertheless, they were probably the most often type of shrinking urban settlements during socialist era, because this type of settlement has been quite common across the eastern half of Europe. The main reason that these cities and towns began to shrink due to the rural exodus in the areas around them, which was very intensive in socialist states (Musil, 2005). In the other side, the second reason is their isolation and the distance from major cities and development corridors, which limited the industrial growth of such places. This trend was more noticeable in the last decades of socialism, with the decrease of birth rate and with the more severe demographic exhaustion of countryside.

Furthermore, the trend was especially visible in the countries with already low population density, such as Russia (Wegren, 1995). The right showcase is the Town of Yuryevets (Rus. Юрьевец) in Ivanovo Oblast. This town was the first urban settlement in this region, established in 13th century and was the important port on Volga River till 20th century (Trevish, 2003). However, modern development bypassed Yuryevets, while river activities could sustain the previous glory. Hence, the town has been shrinking since the 1960s despite rich urban heritage.

Type 2c: The first shrinking cities due to industrial decline

The shrinking of cities in old industrial areas in northern Bohemia and southern Eastern Germany (Saxony) is the third type. It differs from the previous two types, because their urban shrinkage is essentially linked to industrial decline. Two mentioned areas were already well-industrialised and urbanised before socialism and their metalworking industry and mining were pretty outdated even during socialist era (Musil, 2005). Quite small rural surrounding could not replace the negative demographic implications in the cities with diminishing industry.

A well-known example is Leipzig in Saxony (Fig. 4), which was the second biggest city in the former Eastern Germany. The city was industrialised before the WWI (Bontje, 2005). This industry was mainly obsolete after the war. Moreover, the socialist state intentionally suppressed the further development of Leipzig and its urbanised vicinity due to its high density and inherited high development (Florentin, 2010). Thus, the city lost almost 25% of its pre-war population or more than 200 thousand inhabitants till 1990 (Rink et al, 2011). The urban shrinkage of Leipzig even continued after the fall of socialism, eventually re-growing from 2010s.



_ Fig. 4: Leipzig was a shrinking city in (Eastern) Germany with typical socialist features (source: flickr.com)

CONCLUSIONS

The last type of socialist shrinking cities described is particularly indicative for the present-day urban shrinkage in Eastern Europe. As places where an 'industrial congestion' and its technological anachronism caused an early urban decline during socialism, they are precursors to the incomparably larger shrinkage process after the collapse of socialist system in Europe, in the early 1990s. The explained example of Leipzig and many similar major cities in Eastern Germany (Dresden, Rostock, and Magdeburg) that have entered reurbanisation last years confirms also that their long struggle with deindustrialisation and pre-orientation to a service economy was eventually successful and that they can be a role-model for many other cities across post-socialist space.

However, the named cities are probably a good example for the reurbanisation and redevelopment of major cities, because middle-size and small cities and towns are still shrinking across the region, regardless of the development level of the country they belong. The future is still triggering even in the most development (Eastern) Germany (Kühn and Liebmann, 2012). The majority of pre-socialist and socialist shrinking cities also point that these cities are particularly prone to general urban decline if they are further isolate, such as the cities close to 'hard' borders, without dependent (rural) area and far away from the main transport/development corridors and nodes. This is one of the key conclusions in the recent World Bank report about shrinking cities in post-socialist countries; the most vulnerable cities and towns are those with smaller population and spatially isolated ("single cities") (Restrepo Cadavid et al, 2017).

The last conclusion reveals that the causes of urban shrinkage have not changed drastically in the last hundred years, regardless of different political and economic context. The slower urbanisation before modern period, the anomaly of many new borders during interwar period and, finally, the consequences of the improper maintenance of old industrial facilities in socialism are certainly the factors that are significant for the research of widespread post-socialist urban shrinkage in Eastern Europe. The fall of socialism was only a trigger for the outspread of urban shrinkage. In accordance with this, the further research on the character and examples of urban shrinkage in Eastern Europe before post-socialist transition matters from contemporary perspective and it had to be more in the agenda of the future research across this region.

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