

LITERATURE

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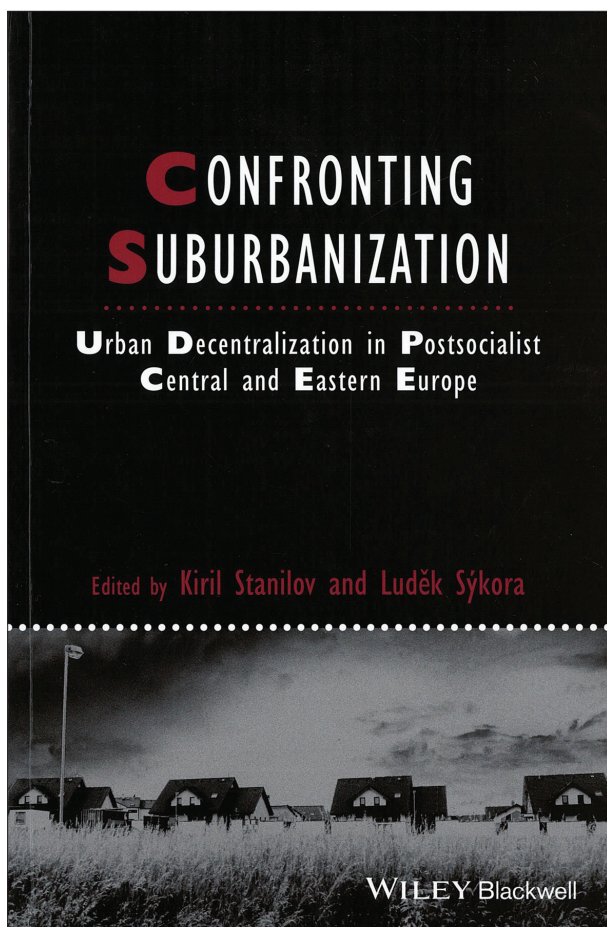
Stanilov, K. and Sýkora, L. (eds.): Confronting Suburbanization. Urban Decentralization in Postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe. Wiley Blackwell, Chichester, 360 p.

The book focuses on the process of suburbanization that has been perhaps the most spectacular spatial phenomenon of urban restructuring in post-socialist countries. It provides a detailed overview about the migration from core cities to suburbs, the reasons and consequences of suburbanization, and the common features and distinctive characteristics of the process in the post-socialist cities. In addition, it explores the impact of the globalization, the EU-enlargement, the financial crisis and the role of local authorities, investors, and inhabitants. Although single papers have been excessively published on suburbanization in individual cities in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe, however, this is the first

attempt to evaluate suburbanization from a comparative perspective in the region.

The structure of the book follows the traditions: an introductory and two summarizing chapters were written by the two editors, Kiril STANILOV and Ludek SÝKORA. In between the reader finds seven case studies about the capital cities of Central and Eastern Europe. The introductory chapter argues that the main factors of rapid suburbanization were the privatization of state assets, the deregulation of economic activities, and the decentralization. These reforms (implemented right after the change of regime) created favourable conditions for the rapid sprawl of population, services, and commerce.

The concluding chapters and the case studies equally emphasize the importance of national policies (e.g. privatization) and local authorities. In the early phase of transition suburbanization was triggered by the mass provision of land by suburban municipali-



ties causing substantial population loss in big cities. The EU-enlargement brought about significant changes because the countries had to establish their regional authorities and environmental policies and regulations had to be developed in line with EU standards. The effects of the urban sprawl, however, did not always reach an alert line on behalf of public authorities; therefore, policy responses were either late or completely missing. The authors claim that if suburbanization is lessening, it is mainly due to market forces, like the financial crisis or the urban rehabilitation programs that increased the supply of high quality inner-city dwelling stock.

The case studies were prepared according to a common methodology. The authors first put the suburbanization in its historical context, summarizing the pre-socialist and state socialist periods. This is followed by an introduction of the post-socialist processes. Not only the suburbanization of population, but of trade, services and other functions are analyzed. The role of the different actors like public authorities, urban developers, planners and the market is also explored. The common structure makes the individual chapters very transparent and comparable.

The case example of Ljubljana presented by PICHLER-MILANOVIĆ, N. demonstrates that the deregulation, the lack of coherent strategy, and the inadequate cooperation of local governments have a lot of negative effects. Despite the negative consequences of the urban sprawl, suburbanization has proved to be sustainable in Ljubljana. This is explained by the dispersed pattern of the settlement system, the spread of energy-efficient construction, and the improvements in sewage facilities.

The metropolitan area of Prague is highly fragmented (more than 200 settlements) which would require greater cooperation among the suburban localities. However, during the transition period, a competition began among the local governments for attracting new jobs and residents. The lack of competence at higher administrative levels resulted in negative consequences as far as the authors of the case study, Ludek SÝKORA and Ondrej MULIČEK claim. The priorities in Prague's metropolitan region were the improvement of transport connections and the construction of roads, while the environmental issues were completely neglected.

The heterogeneity of the agglomeration zone is one of the main characteristics of the Sofia Metropolitan Area. According to the authors, Kiril STANILOV and Sonia HIRT, the attractive natural environment of the Vitosha Mountain close to the southern border of the city determines the direction of suburban migration.

The mobile middle class people tend to move to this southern area, while the northern suburbia has remained a deteriorated industrial zone inhabited mainly by lower class people. The process of suburbanization started around Sofia in the 2000s and dramatically slowed down after the financial crisis; the price of newly built houses has decreased by 40 percent since 2008.

The Budapest Metropolitan Area is similarly divided but the heterogeneity of the zone is explained not only by its physical geographical features but also by the direction of the main roads, and the characteristics and functions of the suburban settlements. The authors of the chapter – Zoltán Kovács and Iván Tosics – have identified three economic growth poles around Budapest each having logistics, commerce or industry as a driving force behind. Authors also point out that in the mid-2000s the outflow of population lessened, while the city itself started to grow again. This was partly the consequence of the urban rehabilitation programs that resulted in a steady growth of newly constructed dwellings inside the city boundaries. Budapest was the first case among post-socialist cities where national legislation intervened and prevented limitless land conversion in the suburban belt by a law in 2005.

The main characteristic of the Estonian capital is that in Tallinn suburbanization was driven by the cheaper housing due to an oversupply of flats in the periphery. This supply was partly created by the Russian-speaking residents who left Estonia after the country became independent, thus their apartments and summer homes became vacant at a relatively low price level. The authors (LEETMAA, K., KÄHRIK, A., NUGA, M. and TAMMARU, T.) claim that the main period of suburbanization in Tallinn was also in the early 2000s like in all other postsocialist countries.

Warsaw is the only large capital city in Central and Eastern Europe which has continuously increased its population during the last 25 years, while the suburban periphery also experienced increasing population growth rates. Authors (LISOWSKI, A., MANTEY, D. and WILK, W.) pay special attention to the conflicts between the old and new residents of the suburban settlements caused by their different lifestyles, attitudes and development preferences.

Moscow is the most special case among the analyzed cities, not only because of its size, but also because the very nature of urban development is different. The major sources of metropolitan growth are not suburbanizing residents arriving from the core city, but the newcomers from other parts of the country and from Post-Soviet states. Despite the large scale housing constructions over the last two decades the agglomeration of Moscow is still very heterogeneous; it maintains a strong agricultural character. The authors (BRADE, I., MAKHROVA, A. and NEFEDOVA, T.) claim that the proportion of unregistered inhabitants and informal economic activity is extremely high.

The editors' conclusion is that the conditions of suburbanization were set by the new capitalist system implemented after 1990, and its ideological platform, the neoliberal state. After the crisis this doctrine must be revised because the uncoordinated urban sprawl contradicts to the principles of sustainable development. This is a very readable book and a successful trial to set the suburbanization of post-socialist cities in a global context.

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