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Multiple transformations: conceptualising post-communist urban transition

Abstract

This paper develops a conceptual framework for interpreting the process of urban change in post-communist cities. The departure from the legacies of the communist past has been effectuated through multiple transformation dynamics of institutional, social and urban change. Wile institutional reforms have been largely accomplished, the adjustment of urban land use patterns to new societal conditions is still far from completed. Hence, post-communist cities are still cities in transition. Using this interpretative framework and referring to a wide spectrum of academic work, the paper provides an overview of urban restructuring in post-communist countries over the past two decades with a specific focus on the examples of mutual integration of the three fields of transformation.

Key words: post-communist city, transition, transformations

Introduction

Even though the last few years have seen the publication of a wide range of scholarly contributions to the field of post-communist urban studies (see, for example, Hamilton *et al.* 2005; Tsenkova and Nedović-Budić, 2006; Borén and Gentile, 2007; Stanilov, 2007), we would argue that they too often focus on providing broad descriptions of urban transformation dynamics, rather than developing critical interpretive or explanatory frameworks. In this paper, we offer a more explicit grounding of the theorisation of urban change in post-communist cities.

We argue that post-communist city is an important object of study which investigation brings new insights into urban studies. Hence, we first scrutinise the notion of post-communist city. We explicitly react to debates where the continued ability of the notion of 'post-communism' to offer a relevant framework for the analysis of various phenomena in former socialist countries is being put into question. Such thinking avoids post-communism, assuming that transition/transformation is already over, and that cities should be approached from perspectives that dominate Western debates set within the relatively stable environment of a globalising capitalist society (Tasan-Kok, 2004).

In the main body of the paper, we develop a conceptual framework for interpreting the process of urban change in post-communist cities. We argue that the departure from the legacies of the communist past has been effectuated through multiple transformation dynamics of institutional, social and urban transitions. These multiple transitions follow a specific temporal sequence. In general, they move from addressing universal to more specific areas, from the political application of normative concepts to spontaneously unfolding social changes. In other words, urban transformations would not happen without transformations in the basic political and economic rules, which allowed for and stimulated economic and social restructuring that was in turn expressed in urban change.

We argue that the nature of urban restructuring in post-communist countries has a common logic. By proposing a framework that suggests a layering and sequencing of institutional norms, social practices and urban spatial formations in the transformation of the post-communist city, we address the complex web of underlying relations and driving forces of urban change. We offer an overview of key themes under each of the levels of transformation with references to an extensive body of literature on post-communist urban change. The theoretical framework allows us to relate and integrate specific themes and insights into the complex picture of post-communist urban restructuring.

Current knowledge of post-communist cities is highly uneven. Budapest, Prague and Warsaw have been overrepresented in the academic literature on post-socialist cities since the early 1990s, with Ljubljana, Tallinn, Moscow and Sofia joining them in the 2000s. Cities such as St. Petersburg and Kiev have only recently become objects of urban research (Popson and Ruble, 2000; Axenov et al., 2005; Borén, 2005). Few metropolitan areas serve as the major source of knowledge. They are not typical, but rather specific cases that usually represent the leading edge of social and urban change in their respective countries. Despite the unequal terrain of knowledge, we think that focus on those cities and urban processes which are moving the frontier is justified by their key role in society, and in setting examples of developments that are likely to impact other cities and regions.

Theorising post-communist city: multiple transformations

Even though the series of deep-seated political and economic transformations in the former communist states of Eastern and Central Europe (ECE) is already two decades old, it is still difficult to describe urban areas in this part of the world with the aid of a stable set of attributes. Their defining feature remains the incessant and relentless process of

structural transformation that has started to unfold since the end of communism.

Post-communist[1] cities are cities under transformation. Urban landscapes formed under socialism are being adapted and remodeled to new conditions shaped by the political, economic and cultural transition to capitalism (Sýkora 2009a). Cities in former communist countries can not be anymore seen as socialist cities. Their development is now largely governed by market forces and democratically elected governments. Yet, they are not fully developed capitalist cities either. Looking at their morphology, land use and social segregation we can document typically capitalist city areas and districts, while sections of urban landscapes resemble frozen mirrors of socialism. The reorganisation of urban landscapes in post-communist cities that began with the institutional reforms of the 1990s is far from complete.

The post-communist transition is sometimes understood and interpreted as a set of institutional changes that were accomplished by national governments during the 1990s. Accepting this perspective, urban change in the countries whose governments have completed the prescribed institutional reforms can now be interpreted in a post-transition framework (see Leetmaa *et al.,* 2009 about the transitional 1990s and the post-transitional 2000s) and hence we may speak about 'cities after transition' (the network of urban researchers

on post-communist urban change bears a name CAT – Cities After Transition, http://citiesaftertransition.webnode.cz/). However, we consider this perspective to be narrow. We offer an alternative, more inclusive perspective on post-communism. For us, post-communist transition involves a much wider set of social and urban processes, including transformations in the urban spatial organisation of the built environment, land use and residential segregation.

Although cities are now in a time period that we can call 'after-institutional-transition', they are also engulfed by a series of socio-economic transformations, reflected in processes of urban change marked by the reconfiguration of the built environment, land-use patterns and residential socio-spatial differentiation. Thus, while the classic transition understood as institutional transformation may be formally over, post-communist cities are still very much undergoing other post-communist transformations. For instance, we would argue that substantial portion of contemporary land use changes in post-communist cities are outcomes of adjustments to new social conditions and can be interpreted as a part of the transition.

The key aspect for understanding post-communist urban change is the distinction between the short-term period when the basic principles of political and economic organisation are changed, the medium-term period

when peoples' behaviours, habits and cultural norms are adopted to a new environment and transformations in a number of spheres and begin to effect broader societal change, and the long-term period in which more stable patterns of urban morphology, land use and residential segregation are reshaped. Hence, we argue that understanding and interpreting post-communist urban restructuring reflects the interactions between three aspects of post-communist transition: *i)* the institutional transformations that created a general societal framework for transition, *ii)* transformations of the social, economic, cultural and political practices exhibited in the everyday life of people, firms and institutions and resulting in social restructuring, and *iii)* the transformation dynamics of urban change (Figure 1).

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

Before proceeding to discuss the three dimensions of transition that form the core of our argument, we would like to revisit one of the key academic debates relevant to the region we are studying: the bi-decennial controversy between the concepts of transition and transformation. The term 'transition' has mainly been associated with the neo-liberal agenda of shock therapy, based on the radical replacement of the basic political and economic institutions of socialism with democratic and market arrangements

(Blanchard *et al*., 1994; Åslund, 2002; Åslund, 2008). Conversely, the purpose of the concept of 'transformation' has been to accentuate the continuity and path-dependence of post-communist developments, while highlighting the hybrid nature of post-communist realities with respect to the recombination of socialist and capitalist elements as constituents of the new post-communist society (Nielsen *et al.,* 1995; Stark, 1992, 1996; Pickles and Smith, 1998; Smith and Swain, 1998; Pavlínek, 2003).

We offer a more inclusive approach that accommodates the two opposed perspectives on this issue. We use the term 'transition' to accentuate the general departure from communism towards societies that more or less embrace the market and democratic principles. We reserve the concept of 'transformation' to connote the great number of particular institutional, social and urban reconfigurations. We understand the post-socialist transition as a broad, complex and lengthy process of social change (Herrschel, 2007), which proceeds through multitude particular transformations (Sýkora, 2008).

Transition I: institutional reconfigurations

The onset of post-communism was marked by the ousting of the communist party regime and central planning, with the general aim of creating a

democratic political system and a market economy. In many post-communist countries, basic reforms of the political system were achieved in the first months after the collapse of communism. The first democratic elections at the national level were followed by democratic elections at local level and the decentralisation of power to local governments (Enyedi 1998; Bunce, 1999; Tosics, 2005a). Newly established democratic governments focused on the reduction of direct state intervention, the privatisation of state assets, the liberalisation of prices and the establishment of free trade relations with an aim to develop private sector, stimulate the development of markets and reorient trade towards the international economy (EBRD 1999).

Later, the concepts and practices of transition were widened from the initial imperative of minimising the state towards redefining the state in the sense of 'improving the quality of state and private institutions and ensuring that they work well together' (EBRD, 2009, p. 96). It became recognised that in order to function properly, the private sector needs market-supporting public institutions and policies that include 'a functioning legal system to enforce contractual obligations; regulation to deal with external effects and incentive problems; safety nets to allay concerns about social cohesion; physical and intellectual property rights protection; and competition policy' (EBRD, 2009, p. 96).

In their entirety, the rejection of communism and the acceptance of capitalist features have placed the post-communist institutional transition on a somewhat similar trajectory. However, despite their main shared direction – a democratic political system and a market economy – institutional market reforms have not been uniform. Major differences have emerged between the countries that have managed to apply more comprehensively the Western concept of capitalism, and those whose development is more based on the locally specific re-combinations of selected aspects of socialism, capitalism and unique features that have emerged during post-communism. Furthermore, even the quick and effective transformers have differed in the concrete application of reforms. Within transforming societies, countries and cities do not share the same post-communist development paths, as they are moving in a similar direction away from communism (see Figure 2).

(Insert Figure 2 about here)

The main outcomes of institutional transformations, which 'influenced urban development were 1) new societal rules established on democratic policy and (free) market principles; 2) a vast number of private actors operating in the city (including property owners); 3) an openness of local economic systems to international economic forces' (Sýkora. 1999a, p. 81). Some institutional transformations – especially the privatisation of state-

owned assets, including housing – have exerted important impacts on the development of cities and their neighbourhoods and urban zones (Sýkora and Šimoníčková, 1994; Eskinasi, 1995; Häusserman, 1996; Bodnár, 2001; Korhonen, 2001; Kährik, 2000, 2002; Kährik *et al.,* 2003; Dawidson, 2004). For instance, massive privatization of housing leading to dominance of owner-occupation (Brade *et al.* 2009) strongly determined the mobility of population, as well as possibilities for coordinated urban regeneration.

This article does not provide enough room for a comprehensive account of the impact of institutional transformation on particular urban locales. Aside from the explanation of a myriad of various government managed transformation processes, we would also have to acknowledge differences in the nature of institutional transformations among countries. For illustration purposes, we use the example of the use or refusal of restitution (the return of nationalised properties to their previous owners or their descendants) in selected countries, which has created strikingly different conditions within urban property markets.

While Czechia, Estonia and Germany chose to return properties to their pre-socialist owners, Hungary and Romania did not follow this path (Eskinasi, 1995; Häusserman, 1996; Bodnár, 2001; Kährik, 2000, 2002; Kährik *et al.,* 2003; Dawidson, 2004). In the former two states, restituted properties

created a favourable context for the development of property markets in attractive urban neighbourhoods and the suburban ring. The supply of restituted real estate has been a decisive condition for the rapid commercialisation of the central city, the gentrification of some inner-city areas and the suburban 'explosion' of former rural hinterlands. While apartment buildings in the inner-city of Prague were not only privatised, but remained in single ownership thanks to this method of privatisation, inner-city housing privatisation in Budapest has been characterised by the sales of individual flats and consequent fragmentation of ownership within a single building.

Restitution in Prague and Tallinn provided a significant supply of real estate for inner-city property markets, leading to dramatic land-use changes in attractive locations. Commercialisation and gentrification quickly followed thanks to the supply of restituted properties in the form of a building as a single property. This was in contrast with Budapest, where restitution was not applied. The ownership fragmentation within single building in Budapest prevented the quick restoration of properties, while slowing down population change and gentrification (Sýkora, 2005). Without judging which of these outcomes has been better for the city and its inhabitants, the example of restitution demonstrates that the application of different strategies in the course of government-managed institutional

transformations had different implications for following urban and neighbourhood change.

Transition II: social practices and orderings

The outcomes of the institutional transformations – particularly the market rules of resource allocation, the vast number of new private owners, entrepreneurs and firms, and the openness of local economic systems to an international economy – formed the basic conditions for the spontaneous emergence of a series of economic, social and cultural transformations. This 'second' transition in the domain of social organisation and practice has heavily influenced urban change through dynamics of internationalisation and globalisation, economic restructuring-induced deindustrialisation, the growth of producer services, increasing social differentiation, new modes of post-modern culture and neo-liberal political practices (Sýkora, 1994, 2009a; Buzar 2008). Although such processes operate in all post-communist countries, their intensity and character are modified by specific local conditions. In the paragraphs that follow, we discuss these five contingencies in further detail.

Transnational companies and foreign direct investment started to play a decisive role in reshaping local economies and geographies, as well as

determining the position of post-socialist countries, regions and cities in the global economic order (Turnock, 1997; Parysek, 2004; Hamilton and Carter, 2005; Tsenkova, 2008). In major cities, internationalisation was strongly present in producer services that formed the soft infrastructure for the capitalist system's expansion to new markets, and later in consumer services and industrial production. Foreign managers and high-salary employees of foreign companies formed a specific segment of the demand on the high-income housing market (Badyina and Golubchikov, 2005; Medvedkov and Medvedkov, 2007; Sýkora 2005). Conversely, labour immigrants constituted the bottom tier of the socio-economic hierarchy in some countries (Drbohlav and Dzúrová, 2007) leading to the formation of new ethnic enclaves. Foreign investment in real estate – office, retail, industrial as well as residential space – began to change the face of urban landscapes and skylines (Adair *et al.,* 1999; Tasan-Kok, 2004; Stanilov, 2007; Sýkora, 1998, 2007a). The highly uneven balance between western and domestic actors – the former possessing a larger capital stock and access to a more extensive pool of resources (Ghanbari-Parsa and Moatazed-Keivani, 1999; McGreal *et al.,* 2002) – was further increased by the policies and measures favouring foreign enterprises with a strong capital base.

Considering that the economic restructuring processes involved deindustrialisation and tertiarisation (Kavetskyy and Ostaphiychuk, 2005;

Tosics, 2005b), post-communist economic development has been marked by both economic decline and growth. City economies were integrated into the global economy in a highly uneven manner. Capital cities ranked well thanks to their role of national command and control centres and gate-ways into national economies. Successful medium-size regional centres provided cheaper and well-skilled labour for routine production within the global assembly line. At the same time, peripheries were left with a mixture of hope and depression.

Urban economic decline was closely related to the closure of industrial enterprises and affected virtually all post-communist cities. The growth of economic activities concentrated in service sector. The development of consumer services, particularly retail, affected most cities (Nagy, 2001). However, it offered low paid-jobs and had not brought any substantial strengthening of the urban economic base. For urban development, the most important was growth in advance producer services. However, it provided benefits only for major command and control centres, usually capital cities (Gritsai, 1997a; b). This left the remaining urban areas struggling for foreign direct investment in manufacturing that would bring re-industrialisation and jobs for the local population.

Economic restructuring had profound effects on urban landscapes. Deindustrialisation left extensive brownfields behind it, posing both a potential for redevelopment as well as a threat of further decay (Misztal, 1997; Kiss, 1999, 2004; Bárta et al. 2006; Sýkorová 2007). Producer services concentrated on expanding the city cores of major centres, while contributing to their rapid commercialisation (Lisowski and Wilk, 2002; Stanilov, 2007, Sýkora, 1999a). Many of these activities later decentralised to out-of-centre locations and business parks at the city outskirts (Sýkora, 2007a). Retail and tourist facilities in attractive places brought new consumption landscapes to core cities (Cooper and Morpeth, 1998; Hoffman and Musil, 1999), followed by the subsequent expansion of shopping in suburban areas (Pommois, 2004; Rebernik and Jakovčić, 2006; Sić, 2007).

Economic change also induced growing wage and income disparities (Sýkora, 1999b; Węcławowicz, 2002; Szirmai 2007). Although national social security systems mitigated some of the social hardship stemming from economic restructuring, they could not change the generally accepted move towards higher income differentiation that contributed to the rise of social polarisation among households, and the formation of new territorial disparities in the geographies of inequality (Węcławowicz, 2004). Income disparities were reflected in the re-emergence of pre-socialist patterns of residential differentiation, the establishment of new enclaves of affluence, as

well as the emergence of segregated districts of social exclusion (Kovács, 1998; Kowalski and Śleszyński, 2006; Ladányi, 2002; Szczepanski and Slezak-Tazbir, 2008; Węcławowicz 2005; Polanska, 2008). The rapidly growing international migration brought emerging ethnic dimension to residential segregation (Sýkora 2009b) within societies that were originally usually ethnically homogenous.

Social and physical upgrading developed via the incumbent upgrading and gentrification of existing neighbourhoods (Standl and Krupickaité, 2004; Badyina and Golubchikov, 2005; Sýkora, 2005; Chelcea, 2006), the construction of new apartment blocks in inner-city areas (Medvedkov and Medvedkov, 2007), and the growth of new suburban communities of family housing for the 'new rich' and, increasingly, the middle classes. In some post-socialist cities, the escape to rural suburban areas presented a survival strategy for the low-income population (Ladányi, 1997; Ladanyi and Szelenyi, 1998; Leetmaa and Tammaru, 2007), which otherwise would remain trapped in decaying inner-city neighbourhoods and less desirable post-war housing estates.

The new conditions allowed for the development of a greater plurality of values, as well as a tendency towards individualism and the promotion of self-interest. The values and preferences of a younger generation shaped by

new opportunities – in addition to the social deprivation brought about by economic reforms – resulted in the rapid decline of family formation (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, 2002; Frejka, 2008; Sobotka, 2008). The acceleration of the 'second demographic transition' has impacted residential choices, with consequences for urban housing (Steinführer and Haase, 2007). More importantly, consumption has become the key life target for large parts of the population. Globalisation has brought a homogenisation of consumption via the same goods offered by trans-national corporations. But not everyone can enjoy these opportunities equally: consumption is limited by income levels and preferences shaped by custom-made advertising. Shopping centres use visual features and various forms of entertainment to attract consumers, while trans-national corporations highlight their presence in the urban structure (Hirt, 2008a). Private firms use cultural strategies to sell themselves, while strengthening their influence and competitiveness as well as demonstrating their pride and power. The post-modern aesthetic in the post-socialist city has intensified the collage of the past and present, local and global, standard and specific, real and virtual. The socialist propaganda of collective will has been replaced by individual choice in a consumption-orientated capitalist city (Czepczyński, 2008).

Even though real pragmatic politics has mixed neo-liberal ideology with attempts to keep social peace via the retention of at least some socialist

regulation, national and urban governments have generally pursued political strategies influenced by neo-liberal political discourses (Govan, 1995). The decisions of both central governments as well as local politicians have been grounded in a neo-liberal ideology, which sees the free, unregulated market as the only resource allocation mechanism that can generate a wealthy, economically efficient and socially just society. Politicians have perceived the state as the root of all evil in society, and the main enemy of the economy in particular. Urban planning has also been seen as contradictory to the market. Clientelism has prevailed, and *ad hoc* decisions have been preferred over the creation of policies embedded in a long-term plan, strategy or vision of urban development (Sýkora, 2006; Horak, 2007). Internal urban transformations have often been left to the operation of the free market, still partially bound within the framework of traditional rigid physical planning instruments. However, after the first decade of transition, many urban governments learned new techniques of urban management and governance. They started to apply more sophisticated tools, such as strategic planning (Maier, 2000; Dimitrovska-Andrews, 2005; Pichler-Milanović, 2005; Ruoppilla, 2007). The application of European Union programming documents in the accession process has further helped consolidate urban government measures towards more co-ordinated and complex policies to tackle urban problems (van Kempen *et al.,* 2005; Altrock *et al.,* 2006). The power of the planner that governed the allocation of investments in the

socialist city has been supplanted by investors that steer politicians and planners in a direction favourable to capital.

Transition III: reconfiguring the urban landscape

The urban environments of post-communist cities are being adapted and reconfigured to the new conditions created by a myriad of political, economic, social and cultural transformations. The reorganisation of post-communist urban spaces involves the restructuring of existing urban areas and the formation of new post-communist urban landscapes leading to a qualitatively new urban formats. The fact that inherited socialist urban features are often in conflict with the principles of capitalist urban economy is reflected in the reshaping of existing urban structures, including the re-emergence of pre-communist patterns in countries that had an earlier experience of capitalism. The new conditions also stimulate the creation of new post-communist urban landscapes, which become symbolic manifestations of the future city.

The most visible effects of restructuring are typically concentrated in the attractive parts of the city centre, in addition to selected inner-city nodes and zones, as well as numerous suburban locations (Sailer-Fliege, 1999; Sýkora 1999a; Haase and Steinführer, 2005; Hirt, 2006). This is because the main

transformations in the spatial pattern of former socialist cities and their metropolitan areas have included the commercialisation and expansion of urban cores (Sýkora *et al.* 2000; Parysek and Mierzejewska, 2006; Sić, 2007), the dynamic revitalisation of some sections of the inner city (Sýkora 2005; Temelová 2007), and the radical transformation of outer cities and the urban hinterland through suburbanisation (Kok and Kovács 1999; Timár and Váradi, 2001; Lisowski, 2004; Kontuly and Tammaru, 2006; Hirt, 2007, 2008b; Tammaru and Leetmaa, 2007; Leetmaa and Tammaru, 2007; Novák and Sýkora, 2007; Kährik and Tammaru, 2008). Still, large parts of the inner city maintain a relatively modest pace of transformation (Steinführer, 2006; Steinführer and Haase, 2007).

We can also witness a temporal dimension in the change of central cities and suburbs. The first decade of transition in the 1990s was characterised by an investment inflow into city centres, especially in the early reforming countries, triggering a decline in their residential function amidst substantial commercialisation and physical upgrading. This was followed by a process of decentralisation, as investment flowed to both out-of-centre and suburban locations (Sýkora 2007a; Sýkora and Ouředníček 2007). Central and inner-city urban restructuring involved the replacement of existing activities (primarily industry) with new and economically more efficient uses, taking the form of commercialisation (Sýkora, 1999a; Hirt, 2008a), gentrification

(Badyina and Golubchikov, 2005; Feldman, 2000a; Standl and Krupickaité, 2004; Sýkora 2005), the construction of new apartments (Medvedkov and Medvedkov, 2007), brownfield regeneration (Feldman, 2000b; Kiss, 2004), the establishment of new secondary commercial centres (Temelová, 2007), and out-of-centre office clusters (Sýkora, 2007a).

In the course of time, as the personal wealth of the population increased and mortgages became available, suburbanisation became the most dynamic process affecting the metropolitan landscapes of post-communist cities. Residents with different social statuses moved to the suburban areas in the 1990s, because of coping problems in the major cities and/or unfulfilled housing aspirations (Ladanyi and Szelenyi, 1998; Tammaru and Leetmaa, 2007). The 2000s were marked by an intensifying flow of wealthier populations into the suburbs. One of the largest controversies in post-communist urban change is thus linked to the process of suburbanisation, which is being praised for introducing housing choice under free market conditions on the one hand, while being blamed for social, economic and environmental non-sustainability on the other (mainly due to the dramatic increase in daily commuting, see Garb and Dybicz, 2006; Tammaru, 2005). In any case, the compact physical morphology of the former socialist city is being rapidly transformed under the parallel influence of residential and commercial activities sprawling into the hinterland (Nuissl and Rink, 2005;

Ouředníček, 2007; Matlovič and Sedláková, 2007; Sýkora and Ouředníček, 2007; Tammaru *et al.*, 2009).

But such controversies are also evident in city centres, where commercialisation has been accompanied by increasing traffic congestion and has come into conflict with historical heritage (Pucher, 1999; Sýkora 1999a; Hirt and Kovachev, 2006; Kotus, 2006; Bouzarovski 2010a). The visual value of city-centre landscapes has been appropriated by the growth of business service enterprises that clearly demonstrate the strong presence of international private capital (Czepczyński, 2007). The socially and spatially selective gentrification dynamic that is partly associated with foreign business elites has proceeded without challenge, since it has been seen by local politicians as well as the local population as a natural process that brings bourgeois neighbourhoods 'back to their former glory' (Sýkora, 2005). Thus, revitalisation – whether based on residential or non-residential functions – is now directed by capital rather than governments. It has brought investment to some decaying areas, leaving many others unattended (Misztal; 1997, Barta *et al.,* 2006; Bouzarovski, 2009). The emergence of brownfields and the physical and social decline of some housing estates constructed during socialism thus present major problems in the post-socialist city (Maier, 1997, 2005).

Property development brings densification to central city landscapes, while brownfields formed by deindustrialisation present new inner-city spaces of opportunity, whose former structure can be completely remodelled, provided there is sufficient investor interest. City centres are gaining the spirit of business and – in some instances – tourist districts (Hoffman and Musil, 1999; Simpson, 1999), keeping the presence of government and some cultural functions. Tertiarisation has also brought the fortune of growth to outer areas, forming secondary nodes of employment in high-earning services concentrated in office districts (Sýkora, 2007a). These are located alongside new landscapes of consumption in shopping and entertainment complexes that offer mass amenities for the entire population, in addition to low-paid jobs to the less-skilled and mostly female part of the workforce. High concentrations of retail facilities are being strategically placed in new nodes between existing residential areas with their original small neighbourhood centres, and the compact city of mass consumption power and booming wealthy suburbs. The original hierarchically organised system of services with a dominant central city is transformed via layers of new centres into a more polycentric structure.

The socio-spatial patterns of the post-communist city are also changing. The strengthening of existing disparities among parts of cities is counterbalanced by the social re-composition of gentrified districts, declining housing

(Maier, 2005) and the suburbanisation of better-off parts of the population. Surprisingly, socio-spatial disparities between different urban districts have not necessarily increased during the first decades of capitalism (Gentile and Tammaru, 2006); rather, one finds pockets of wealth and poverty at smaller spatial scales (Ruoppila and Kährik 2003; Ruoppila 2005; Marcińczak, Sagan 2010; Bouzarovski *et al.* 2010). This trend has been explained by the fact that segregation processes were initially dampened by socialist legacies, bringing urban districts with a higher or lower social status (such as housing estates and the rural hinterland, respectively) closer to the city average (Sýkora 2007b). However, the new capitalist principles have moved such cities towards outcomes that will imprint themselves more powerfully on post-communist urban spaces in the course of time. This is being gradually signalled by the contrasting pictures provided by ghettoising areas and gated communities, as examples of extreme developments in segregation patterns (Kovács, 1998; Blinnikov *et al.,* 2006; Stoyanov and Frantz, 2006; Brabec and Sýkora, 2009; Brade *et al.,* 2009).

Conclusions

The core argument of our paper was that post-communist cities are subject to three aspects of post-communist transition: *i)* institutional transformations, *ii)* transformations of social practices, and *iii)*

transformations in urban space. While the formal remodelling of the institutional landscape has now been largely completed in many former communist countries, social practices and structures still retain some socialist features and large parts of post-communist cities exhibit a typically socialist urban character. Therefore, we argue that post-communist cities are still cities in transition (Sýkora, 2000). Moving behind the association of transition only with government managed reforms we offer fuller account of post-communism. This wider perspective on the post-communist transition thus still offers a relevant framework for the analysis of social and urban change in former socialist countries.

We also addressed the relationship between post-communist urban restructuring, on the one hand, and, the notions of transition and transformation on the other. We distinguished between general trajectories of social and urban changes and particular mechanisms through which they are realised. Urban transition consists of transformations in land use or socio-spatial patterns affected by such transformation processes as gentrification or suburbanisation realised in transformation localities such as brownfields, gated communities or places of socially excluded. We point that the emergence and character of gated communities or gentrification in post-communist cities can not be properly understood without reference to social transition and in particular to transformation in social stratification

related to income polarisation at labour markets, on the one hand, and without understanding to particularities of certain government managed institutional reforms such as property privatization and rent deregulation.

Urban change in post-communist cities has been significantly shaped by the character of institutional reforms and transformations in social practices. Our underlying claim is that the character and sequence of multiple transformations produce a new and in many ways unique sets of urban circumstances. The complex interpretation an explanation of urban change in post-communist cities thus requires an explicit integration of the three fields of transformation within a single conceptual framework. Pointing to multiple transformations we attempt to fill the conceptual gap in the study of post-communist cities.

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Notes

[1] We prefer to use the term post-communist to post-socialist. While former societies under the totalitarian rule of Communist parties called themselves socialist and aimed to build an ideal communist society, the reality was quite different. We call the real society communist as it was ruled by communist ideology exercised by communist parties with a distinct impact on the organization of society and daily lives of the citizens. Hence post-communist refers to the state after communism was abolished and during which society adjusts to new conditions.

Figure 1: Multiple transformations

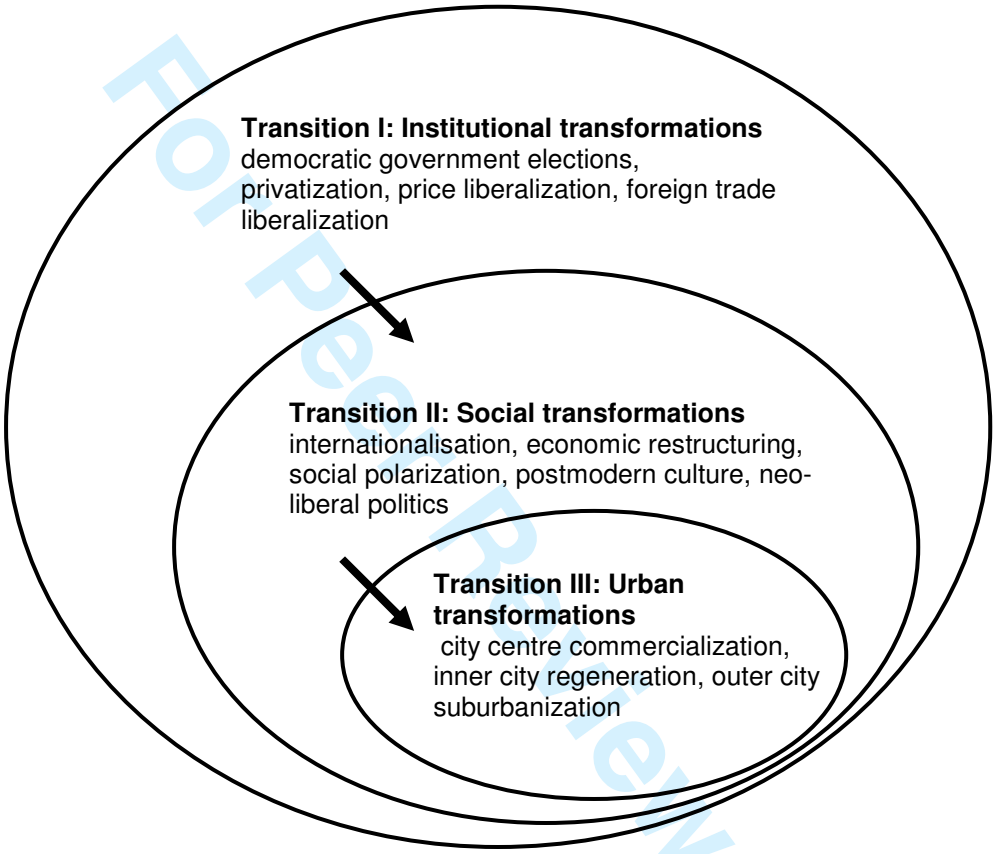

Figure 2: Institutional transformations: multiple country trajectories