

SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC URBAN CENTRES OF EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

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1 Introduction

The 21st century is the age of cities. Today nearly 50 percent of the world's population live in urban spaces, and this rate is continuously increasing. According to forecasts, in 2025 nearly 62 percent of people will live in cities. In the western part of Europe 80 percent of the population are city-dwellers nowadays. The growth of European urban population is a clear evidence for the increasing social, economic, political and cultural importance of cities. Contemporary cities have a strategic role in modernisation and in the organisation and operation of global economy. The prerequisites of modernisation, social and economic development, the actors of the global economy, the knowledge having been accumulated throughout history, the cultural heritage and architectural monuments, the modern infrastructure the urban society is creating and using, the well-educated and trained middle class, the economic, political and cultural elite, are all located and concentrated predominantly in cities.

At the same time modern urban spaces are facing deep conflicts. Cities must struggle with severe social problems, such as the traditional and new structures of social inequalities in neighbourhoods, the past and present forms of urban poverty, the traditional and modern forms of crime, the damages of natural environment, the different manifestations of social conflicts and now terrorism and the threats of global climate change are the emerging new challenges.

The city centre is one of the major zones of the modern European city. City centres have a fundamental role in the dispersion of global economy and in the economic competitiveness of cities. City centres are preserving the values of the historic past, the architectural heritage and the results of past urbanisation. A large portion of urban physical and social problems is concentrated in city centres. Thus, they truly reflect the city's overall development level, the wealth of urban society, the care or carelessness of urban municipalities.

In Western Europe various efforts have been made to moderate the symptoms of the physical and social crisis in urban centres and edges, to ease the spatial

outcomes and conflicts of social polarisation between city centres and outer districts through the practical implementation of the concept of social sustainability since the 1990s. The realisation of the concept has been hindered by several factors but it has also offered general methods of treatment for several local problems.

This is an important point, because during the socio-economic transition of the 1990s it became evident that a series of new physical and social problems had been arisen in East Central European cities, with an increasing level of social polarisation. The processes of socio-spatial exclusion have also intensified the growth of urban poverty. From the processes having been observed so far, it seems that the social problems of urban centres having evolved in global and Western European urban development processes are relevant in the context of contemporary East Central European urban development as well. Thus, the Western European concept of socially sustainable urban development may be necessary to be implemented in East Central Europe.

In this paper I would like to provide an analysis of the above-mentioned issues. On the one hand, I am going to give an overview of the social sustainability problems of East Central European urban development, with the constraints concentrated in city centres. On the other hand, I attempt to analyse the differences and similarities between the social sustainability problems of Western and East Central European urban development.

2 The problems of European urbanization and social sustainability

2.1 Main characteristics of urbanisation in Western and East Central Europe

Several studies have verified that East Central European urbanisation is embedded into modern global urbanisation and should not be considered as a special socialist model. It follows a trend influencing advanced Western European urbanisation processes and varies by the diverse historic background of nations and by the specific power mechanisms and socio-political environment of the regions (*Enyedi, 1992*). The differences of East Central European urban processes from Western European development trends partly originate from the region's different historic background. The history of the countries of East Central Europe both in the 19th and 20th centuries was dominated by the dependency on different 'great powers', the absence of a Western-European-style autonomous urban development, a peripheral socio-economic situation and – as a result of these factors – a delayed urbanisation process (*Weclawowicz, 1992*). The process

of industrialization and urbanisation in East Central Europe started only in the 19th century. For a long time Polish and Hungarian societies were preserving their rural character (in 1950, 70 percent of Poland's and 60 percent of Hungary's population was still rural). Czech society, as the core urban region of East Central Europe, was at a higher stage of urban development (*Enyedi, 1992; Weclawowicz, 1977*).

The state-socialist system further increased the existing differences between the urban development of East and West. The socio-political and power system of state socialism partly slowed down the evolution of global urbanisation processes and partly restrained the manifestation of the processes themselves¹.

The transformation processes of the 1990s, the political, social and economic changes in East Central Europe, the European integration, the EU accession and globalisation are continuously closing the gap between the urban centres of Eastern and Western Europe and at the same time increasing their similarities. However, some special features originating from the historic past, from their transformation, from the simultaneous manifestation and conflicts of global economic, social and political processes are still perceivable.

The countries of East Central Europe are urbanised above the world-average. The proportion of urban population is somewhere between 58 and 74 percent in these countries. The concentration of urban population, economic activities and global capital in urban regions are indicators of a Western-European-style development trend² (*Illés, 2002*). Urban development processes differ by country size; there are significant differences between small and large countries in East Central Europe (*Illés, 2002*). *Table 1* shows the extent of these national differences. As it can be seen, the concentration of the population in cities with over 100,000 inhabitants (and in capital cities) is the highest in Poland. Poland is followed by Hungary, and Hungary is followed by the Czech Republic, concerning the concentration level of inhabitants in the largest cities.³

¹ Due to the redistributive mechanism of the state-socialist system in East Central European countries, the regional authorities of governance, planning and development were exclusively central governmental bodies. The specific features of development and planning decisions evolved through in-house negotiation mechanisms, independently from local residents and socially involved groups, i.e. from the public sector. Local powers were authorized neither to proclaim their opinion nor to make decisions during the planning process. The central government collected all the local resources and redistributed them through its own interest and preference system. Settlements were fully subordinated to the central state's decisions. Later on this system was eased off (in Hungary mostly in the 1980s).

² The majority of the large cities of East Central Europe may be regarded as only medium-sized in the European dimension of city-size categorisation (*Jeney, 2002*).

³ Tables for this paper were compiled by Zsuzsa Váradi, and here I would like to express my gratitude for her work.

TABLE 1
The distribution of population by city size, 2004, %

City size category	Poland	Czech Republic	Hungary	Slovakia
Below 5000 inhabitants	2.40	20.11	1.48	N/A
5 000 – 9 999	3.40	9.35	5.98	N/A
10 000 – 49 999	17.80	12.23	21.76	N/A
50 000 – 99 999	80.60	11.32	7.52	N/A
Over 100 000 inhabitants	29.40	9.22	11.41	N/A
The share of capital city from the total	4.40	11.45	16.80	7.9
The national level concentration of urban population	66.00	73.68	64.99	57.4

Sources: <http://www.stat.gov.pl/test/search.jsp>, <http://www.fat.admin.ch/eaee96/abstracts/s24.pdf>, Central Statistical Office Hungarian Statistical Yearbook 2004, www.statistik.sk, www.infostat.sk/vdc/.

Following global trends, large cities, or rather the capital cities, have a key role in socio-economic modernisation (Weclawowicz, 1998). Even in the period of state-socialism special urban development policies enabled urban growth for large cities besides capital cities. Large industrial plants and the majority of new homes were built in the major cities that later on, due to their territorial administrative functions, developed into redistribution centres as well (Illés, 2002). The economic transformation brought about by the change of regime was favourable for large cities, the highest volume of FDI was targeted into the capital and major cities, and the speed of economic restructuring was also the fastest there.

The differences between the development trajectories of Western European and East Central European cities verify the follow-up character of the latter region's development phase, i.e. the urbanisation processes of the East closely follow Western European urban development processes, although with some delay, resulting from historic reasons. Due to socio-economic suburbanisation, the urban population of Western European metropolises has constantly been decreasing, and this trend was even more significant in the 1980s. However, the re-urbanisation in the 1990s opened a new chapter in the history of global urbanisation, with the proportion of urban population increasing again.

The growth of East Central European metropolises was intensive in the 1950s but turned into a slight decrease from the 1970s. The dropping tendency of urban population was the sharpest during the 1980s (Jeney, 2002). The 1990s increased the intensification of the dynamism of suburbanisation processes.

2.2 Definition of socially sustainable urban development

In this paper I do not intend to provide a detailed discussion of the concept because others have already provided thorough explanations of its meaning (for example Tamás Fleischer cites Susan Murcott, saying that between 1979 and 1997 57 definitions were formulated for the term of sustainability; *Fleischer, 2002*). However, I consider the summary of some of its aspects very important.

Socially sustainable urban development differs from sustainable urban development by attaching greater importance to social aspects, by emphasizing the complexity of the enforcement of environmental, economic and social interests. This is very important, because less attention is paid to social sustainability than to environmental sustainability (*Hancock, 2004*). This interpretation corresponds with the view of the Brundtland Report. The concept is democratic and solidarity-oriented, presupposing the differentiated financial contribution of all social actors affected and involved, and represents the importance of different actions funded by the transnational, national, municipal, public and private sectors, private individuals and non-profit sector resources (*Soóki-Tóth, 2005*).

Socially sustainable urban development – rather as a future concept today – is based on the fair distribution of urban development resources between city centres and the rest of the cities. The distribution of urban development funds serves the physical, mental, economic and social welfare of the urban population. Public policies should support education and the development of human resources. Public policies should support both cultural and social heritage. Urban policy institutions should involve local citizens in local policy-making, urban development decisions, regeneration projects, and should provide and develop their necessary institutional background. Public policies should preserve and improve social cohesion and should explore, negotiate and coordinate urban development interests. This should be based on the principle of social involvement. And finally, policies should combat social exclusion, and should sympathise with socially handicapped and disadvantaged social groups and their members, and should guarantee the peaceful coexistence of different social groups, diverse communities and cultures.

These policies may be realised only in case of harmonising with the values of urban society and its local preferences. The harmonisation of the provision of the necessary preconditions with the realisation thereof may be guaranteed by a continuous dialogue between urban policies and local society through their institutional systems.

This approach comprises several normative elements and enables the implementation of too many rules and regulations issued by higher authorities. For this reason the loosening of normative criteria and the representation of social participation are important elements of implementation. It is also important that

the alternatives of problem management approved by specific professionals (*elite groups*) situated at a distant location from these communities should be tested through realistic social contests, a social legitimacy and a harmonisation of different interests should be achieved. I am convinced that the success of socially sustainable urban development programmes is to derive from the convergence of urban policies with underclass societies. I am also aware of the fact that even the most democratic urban policies are insufficient alone to manage complex socio-spatial problems. The management of urban social sustainability may require structural and local (complex physical and social urban regeneration) investments.

We must also see that the implementation of socially sustainable urban development programmes in East Central European cities is rather difficult, as their indigenous factors are far less manageable than in Western European societies (*Fleischer, 2002*). The relationship of urban policy with civil society and its representative civil organisation system is inadequate. The evolution of a conscious, eco-minded civil society is still faintly recognizable and the number of social institutions with forceful ecological sense is still very small. Due to increasing social polarisation and intensifying pauperization, the preservation of (even environment-damaging) jobs is (also) very important for low social classes, while the value system of middle and high classes is consumption-oriented, damaging the natural environment in several cases (*Szirmai, 1999*).

Only an increased power and a far stronger cooperation of social actors, civil societies and international, national and local professional associations and municipalities interested and involved in socially sustainable urban development could fundamentally change the present system.

3 Urban development processes and the problems of social sustainability

3.1 Development of urban centres: global trends

The crisis phenomena of urban centres first emerged in US cities. The accelerated urban development of the early 20th century, the rapid concentration of economy and population in metropolitan regions, the immigration of rural population into urban settlements and urban centres generated a gap between population growth and infrastructural development. Buildings in inner cities were quickly eroded, housing estates turned into slums, the problems of natural environment, the level of noise, transport problems grew to an unbearable level for the locals. Physical degradation was followed by negative social phenomena

and conflicts: the immigration of marginalised social classes, the concentration of underclass and disadvantaged ethnic minorities. Due to the above-mentioned factors the wealthy part of urban society – mostly members of the white middleclass – started to leave the city centres and moved to the outer districts and suburban zones (Hoyt, 1973).

The crisis of urban centres is not an explanation alone for the relocation of urban development from central urban districts into suburban zones and for the depopulation of city centres. The deconcentration of the economy, the functional transformation of urban centres, the increasing car traffic, the growing number of suburban shopping centres, the rise of middle classes and their changing residential attitude were the key factors behind this process.

In Western Europe the deconcentration of the economy, the outbreak efforts of metropolitan economy and society intensified during the 1950s and 60s. The perishing of urban environment was perceptible in central urban districts as well. Nevertheless, the urban environment in Europe never produced so deep crisis phenomena as in North America. The European middle class never turned away from inner city quarters in such an extent as did the North American elite classes. European countries had never reached such a volume of car traffic as North America had, because of smaller distances and more advanced public transport.

During the 1980–90s new trends emerged in urban spatial processes. In the highly developed countries of Western Europe (and even in the USA and Japan) the quick (re)concentration of social and economic life, the metropolitan concentration of global capital with its institutional system, the rise of multi-regional, interregional and transnational corporations, the growth of the service sector and qualified labour could be observed (Sassen, 1991; Veltz, 1996). The demands of global economy required functional changes in central urban districts, such as the transformation of residential districts into administrative and business quarters. Several urban regeneration projects were carried out in the city centres of Europe. These processes were formed through the articulation of the demands of globalisation and global economy towards urban centres; globalisation generated social groups' demands for positioning themselves into dwelling places located in urban centres. Various studies have pointed out that top-ranked global corporations and their employees (top-salary managers, highly qualified professionals) are generally located in central urban districts, while regular national companies and members of the national middle class are situated rather on urban peripheries or good-quality suburbs (Sassen, 1991). The new trends of segregation referred to as 'embourgeoisement' or 'gentrification' gave rise to the upper-middle classes in central urban districts.

Since the 1990s the social structure of European cities has been shaped by the complementary and contradictory processes of gentrification and marginalisa-

tion. Gentrification has become the most characteristic feature of historic urban centres, of the traditional elite urban quarters ('Beaux Quartiers') and elegant suburbs, while marginalisation is rather typical in peripheral urban districts (*Herman–Leuthold, 2005*). Following the regeneration of urban centres, the wealthy, native urban population moved out from their old run-down homes built in the 1950–60s and migrated into the residential districts of inner-city zones. Their places were occupied by socially low-ranked immigrants and deprived classes. This process created a new spatial system of social inequalities, a wide gap between the central urban quarters of professional, wealthy and modern urban classes and the outer urban districts of poorly educated groups, less integrated into urban society (*Herman–Leuthold, 2005*).

3.2 The crisis of East Central European urban centres: the historical heritage

Since the 1970s the urban centres of East Central Europe have continuously been suffering from several problems: the physical decline of historic monuments and residential buildings, the growing number of slums, the perishing natural environment. The symptoms of urban deterioration became more significant in the 1980s. The social impact of physical degradation was far less serious in the cities of East Central Europe than in Western Europe. Although some social scientists had predicted severe problems in the structure of urban society – the concentration of the poor, the old-aged and the Roma population in large cities was significant even in the socialist period (*Ladányi–Szelényi, 1988; Musil, 2002*) –, the massive out-migration of middleclass people to the urban periphery did not start at that time, even though the distribution mechanisms of state housing provision, the building of new housing estates created opportunities for 'quasi-suburbanisation' in these cities. In several cases the society of housing estates originated from the wealthy, socially high-positioned classes of the city centres, with better political chances for the enforcement of their interests. Within the framework of a redistributive state housing provision system, the modern, new housing estates built in the outskirts, equipped with all comfort and amenities were considered as an acknowledgement of social and political position and a bonus for loyalty to the state. The less-preferred lower-middle classes, positioned at a lower level of the social and political rank-system, had no chance to leave their homes located in urban centres within the framework of the state housing provision system (*Cséfalvay, 1995*).

The physical and social problems of city centres in East Central Europe are partly inherited from state-socialism. The development of urban centres was not or was only partly integrated into urban policies (*Lichtenberger et al. 1995*). In

the ideological system of state-socialism the city centre was considered as a kind of conservative, bourgeois phenomenon, and for this reason urban development had no priorities for the maintenance and improvement of the city centre. Political, ideological considerations, the efforts to manage the housing problems of the working class, the challenges of quantitative housing shortage also played an important role in focusing the urban development on housing estates. Due to the utilisation of infrastructural development funds for housing estate construction, urban regeneration programmes were lacking or were completed at certain urban spots only. The treatment of crisis in urban centres was also hindered by the deepening economic crisis of the state-socialist system. The involvement of private capital in these projects was also impossible at that time.

3.3 Contemporary transformation processes of East Central European urban centres

The 1990s was a period of fundamental changes. They took place in a very contradictory way, with a rapid and spectacular development in certain areas of urban centres, while other areas were declining. The reasons for urban restructuring originate from 'city-life'-oriented development processes, from the domination of business and commercial functions. This assigns characteristic features to metropolitan centres: the mushrooming of financial centres, banks, office quarters, the raising of new or the rehabilitation of old urban economic and commercial centres, the construction of new service infrastructure, hotels, shopping centres and business- or market-oriented real estate developments. The elegant shops, new restaurants, bars and cafes, pedestrian streets, tourist spots have created a modern urban environment in city centres.

Inner city quarters, with their new architectural styles, invoke the atmosphere of global and Western European cities. This is explained by the stronger dependence of inner cities on the expansion of global economy and on its local impacts than on the processes of national economy. The special urban features of city centres, hotels, office blocks, commercial centres, fast-food restaurants, becoming more and more standardised in their functional solutions and applied design, serving the interests of large multinational commercial and service firms. This inner-city structure, turning more and more homogenous in its tendency, mostly represents the interests of transnational and cosmopolitan elite groups (*Martinotti, 2004*). Principally, in the first years of the change of regime the national urban elites (including architects and urban professionals) were unanimously supporting global urban development trends, but today a growing number of critical remarks is expressed towards them, as they are threatening the

national features of urbanism, the special historical origins of the architecture of inner cities (*Stroppa, 2003; Szirmai–Baráth, 2005*).

These criticisms reflect the European trends too, as recently the national, local and architectural cultures have become appreciated in Western European cities and their conservation has become a key issue.

Central urban residential districts are also undergoing a progressive development process. This is partly in correlation with the fact that the transformation of residential buildings into offices, the letting-out of flats for office purposes, along with the renovation of buildings have become typical trends following the privatisation of the public housing stock. The increasing number of regenerated urban quarters is an everyday process of our time. They are formulated by different models, in most cases within the framework of public-private partnerships. So far the rehabilitation models organised on a social basis have remained rather plans or experiments than living realities. For this reason the slow and isolated nature of urban regeneration projects is a general problem in East Central European cities.

The implementation of the rehabilitation projects of central urban neighbourhoods has also been hindered by the poor financial resources of local governments, not enough for funding comprehensive urban regeneration projects. Housing privatisation models are also problematic, as the majority of East Central Europeans is a homeowner with low income, and the renovation of their dwelling is unaffordable for most of them. The sharpening of social polarisation and the increasing income differences are also obstructive factors of involving private capital in regeneration projects. For this reason the physical deterioration of homes in the socially disadvantaged, broken-down historic districts of East Central European cities is a growing tendency. The quality of public spaces in urban centres, the living environment of green belts have significantly worsened, particularly in areas situated off the beaten track of the mainstream of urban development.

3.4 Special features of urban societies in East Central Europe

During the 1990s the population of the urban centres of East Central Europe radically decreased (*Table 2*). This is a natural consequence of city centre formation, of its changing historic role, of its weakening residential functions, and of the domination of business-administrative functions (*Lichtenberger, 1995*). Increasing suburbanisation, the intensification of out-migration processes and the natural decrease of population have all contributed to the downfall of inner-city population. The socio-demographic structure of urban centres has also undergone fundamental changes. The ageing of population, the concentration of

Table 2
*The percentage of the natural population growth/decrease in the capital cities of our investigation**

	Warsaw		Bratislava		Prague		Budapest**	
	Heads	Percentage of the capital city's value, %	Heads	Percentage of the capital city's value, %	Heads	Percentage of the capital city's value, %	Heads	Percentage of the capital city's value, %
Natural growth/decrease in the cities of our investigation	-5085	100.00	-607	100.00	-3431	100.00	-5522	100.00
Natural growth/decrease within the total of urban centre residents	-6090	119.76	-306	50.41	-440	12.82	-4141	74.99

* The author's own calculations on the basis of the following resources.

** Budapest data are relevant for year 2003.

Sources: www.stat.gov.pl/urzedy/warsz/publikacje/publ_el/panorama_dzielnic_2003/panorama_dzielnic_warszawy.pdf

www.infostat.sk/vdc/pdf/prognoza_web/ang/nuts4/

www.praha.cz/xa/ediciplan.nsf/kapitola/13-1101-05_2005_statisticka_rocenka_hl_m_prahy-03

www.budapest.hu/engine.aspx?page=BpKezikonyv

old-age pensioners in urban centres is a typical phenomenon in all major cities of East Central Europe (Table 3). The ratio of old-aged population in the urban centres significantly surpasses the urban average, though estimations are forecasting a downward tendency in this field. The high concentration of single-person households in urban centres is also a living reality, while bigger households are located predominantly in suburban districts (Weclawowicz, 1998). The comparative analyses of East Central European capital cities show that ethnic segregation is stronger in the core urban districts of Budapest than in Prague or Warsaw (Weclawowicz, 1998; Drbohlav–Cermák, 1998; Ladányi–Szelényi, 1998).

TABLE 3
The present and estimated percentage of inhabitants over the age of 60 in the capital cities of our investigation

	Warsaw		Bratislava		Prague		Budapest	
	2004	2015	2004	2015	2004	2015	2004	2015
The share of inhabitants over the age of 60 in the cities of our investigation	22.09	30.00	17.95	31.60	15.60	27.10	23.42	n.a.
The percentage of inhabitants over the age of 60 of from the total of urban centre residents	25.40	29.40	25.30	26.40	17.00	n.a.	24.95	n.a.

Source: National Statistical Yearbook.

The spatial impacts of international migration have not been perceptible so intensively in East Central European cities, as legal and illegal immigrants are not integrated into significant territorial subcultures or separate ethnic communities. Contemporary research studies point out that socially high-ranked Western immigrants are living in better-quality urban quarters, such as regenerated urban centres, or in elite suburbs. The dwellings of lower social classes, such as the immigrants of Eastern European countries, are mostly located in the cheaper quarters of urban centres and in cheaper peripheral housing estates (Drbohlav–Cermák, 1998; Beluszky–Szirmai, 2000). All these phenomena verify the dispersion of global trends (Gugler, 2004).

The gentrification trends of European cities, the accelerated return of urban elite classes to downtown residential quarters became obvious during the 1990s. The new and renovated luxury flats in the regenerated urban districts are inhabited mainly by well-to-do classes. Rural middle classes also purchased new flats in central city zones. The atmosphere of central urban location attracted the representatives of the global elite, as well. Following the global trends, national and

international managers, top professionals of multinational firms prefer urban centres (too), when selecting their dwelling location. This is verified by the increasing presence of foreigners and the young generation in urban centres.

3.5 “Dual city”: the polarisation of downtowns and peripheral urban zones

During the last ten years the increase of urban poverty was accompanied by its increasing urban concentration (as relevant figures show, 64 percent of poor classes is concentrated in urban areas in Hungary while this figure is 57 percent in Slovakia). The overall rate of urban poverty within the total population is between 7–10 percent (*Table 4*). This average rate differs by city size. It is generally higher in small towns and lower in large cities. (For example in Poland the rate of urban poverty is 10 percent in small towns and 2 percent in large cities. 2 percent of the citizens of Prague are poor, while this figure is 3 percent in Bratislava and 4.3 percent in Budapest⁴).

TABLE 4
The rate of poverty in urban areas, %

	The percentage of poor classes in urban population*
Hungary	9
Slovakia	10
Czech Republic	7
Poland	7

Various methods are available for the assessment of poverty, the above-shown data are based on the EU’s definition method, i.e. on the relative threshold of poverty.

Data sources: international studies:

http://pdf.dec.org/pdf_docs/Pnadd724.pdf

http://pdf.dec.org/pdf_docs/PNADD748.pdf:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/cz_jim_en.pdf

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/pl_jim_en.pdf

<http://www.kite.hu/index.php?item=hirek&hir=5>

<http://departments.agri.huji.ac.il/economics/lerman-csaki.pdf>

⁴ Sources:

Poland – http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/pl_jim_en.pdf

Prague – http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/cz_jim_en.pdf

Bratislava – http://www.cphr.sk/english/undp2000en_06_part3.pdf

Budapest – Gábor, A. – Szívós, P. 2002: A jövedelmi szegénység alakulása, a gyermekes családok helyzete [Income-based Poverty and the Situation of Families with Children].

The urban location of disadvantaged social classes may be explained not only by historic background and socio-spatial processes, but also by the “dual city” concept. Mollenkopf and Castells used the “dual city” concept for the presentation of socio-spatial inequalities (*Mollenkopf–Castells, 1993*). This concept, having been picked up by other authors as well, demonstrates the macro-spatial phenomena of globalisation-initiated social polarisation, the advantages of territorial units and spatial integrations strongly embedded into global economy, and the disadvantages of areas excluded from this process. The “dual city” concept is a representation of the economic and social contradictions of dynamically developing metropolises, urban agglomerations, complex crisis-stricken industrial cities, and the internal physical and social polarisation of urban areas (*Ascher, 1995*).

Following Western European trends, the low social classes of East Central European urban areas are emerging partly in urban cores, in physically deteriorated urban quarters, slums and cheap housing estates on the one hand, and in poor outer suburbs or in ecologically and infrastructurally handicapped suburban settlements on the other hand (*Lichtenberger, 1995; Szirmai, 2004*). Core areas of urban spaces and well-situated suburbs are the desired residential places of educated and wealthy classes, the social elite and upper-middle classes.

The “dual city” concept also formulates the social structure of urban zones. The isolation is strong between the upper and lower classes of urban cores, as well. City centres and central urban quarters are the segregational islands of the urban elite classes, while depressing central quarters provide residential opportunity for low and marginalised social classes (*Weclawowicz, 1998, 80*).

4 Socially sustainable urban development in city centres

The idea of social sustainability was formulated first by the Brundtland Report (*Brundtland, 1988*). This report, analysing the world’s global problems, gave an account of the untreatable growth problems of the Third World and developing countries, the continuously growing residential demands for housing and better services, and the problems of urban poverty and diseases. The report also dealt with the urbanisation processes of industrialized countries, declining city centres, the unfavourable social impacts of large urban regeneration projects and the new phenomena of urban poverty. For the treatment of problems this report proposes that “a new, powerful but socially and ecologically sustainable economic growth is needed” (*Brundtland, 1987, p. 18*).

Several debates have been devoted to and several questions have been raised about the applicability of sustainability. Special seminars have been held to de-

cide which issues should be the key problems of social sustainability: whether social problems only or other economic, environmental issues or their whole complexity? Another question is what should be sustained? Should we preserve the natural state of environment or rather the current level of socio-economic development? (Enyedi, 1994).

The sustainability of city centres raises similar questions. What should be sustained? Should we preserve the current social structure of today's city centres with their population (including the underclass)? Do we want local residents to keep their homes after urban regeneration? Or rather the historically 'native' citizens, the once outmigrated urban middle class, with their descendants who, after regeneration, returned to the place they had left during the suburbanisation period? Which city centre functions should be preserved: the residential or rather the commercial-administrative ones?

Each decision represents certain interest and residential groups and neglects others. In case of answering with 'yes' for the first question, i.e. saying that the socially sustainable urban development concept should favour the present social structure of city centres with their current population (including socially disadvantaged strata) and should preserve them after urban regeneration, the economic growth of city centres, the modernisation of business and administrative sectors may be hindered and the immigration of new residents may also be inhibited (and limited in the free selection of dwelling place). A positive answer for the second question, i.e. to the preference of the traditional population, the once outmigrated middle class and their descendants or the inflow of global elite classes into city centres, would neglect the interests of the existing (including socially disadvantaged) urban classes.

The harmonisation of different interests, the treatment of conflicts drawing from the different positions and perspectives of social classes may offer better solutions than the present mechanisms. This is also important for easing the conflicts between the different poles of urban society. The change of regime of the 1990s created several conflicts between the urban development criteria system of the users of central urban districts: the global and national (urban) elite classes and the local residents. Local residents now may observe that the differentiated development of city centres brings about inequalities in urban society. They can also observe that government, municipal or private-capital funded development projects are targeted either at the development of city functions or at the housing provision of upper classes. And they also recognize the absence of public welfare and sustainable urban regeneration projects.

Contemporary citizens can now experience the changing social structure of regenerated urban residential quarters: the emergence of wealthy urban classes occupying the territories of the urban poor, the outmigration, and the replacement of lower classes in regenerated central urban quarters. There are conflicts

between the attitudes and expectations of urban elite classes and the users of city services, and the native population. For the latter social group the conservation of historical urban values, the renovation of flats, the protection of natural environment and noise reduction are far more important issues than tourism, local sights, attractions and events concentrated at streets and public spaces only. These elements not only generate noise and busy car traffic but also exclude the locals from city centres, due to high prices and the elite-class-bound features of local events.

Socially sustainable urban development concepts and the rules and programmes linked to them have been prepared by European experts, scientific committees, researchers, participants of international conferences, civil organisations, central and local governments and their representatives who are doing all their best for their implementation. These concepts, rules and programmes strongly represent the complex economic, social and environmental interests of cities. This is clearly verified by the programmes having been realised in concrete problematic urban districts within the framework of the European Union's urban regeneration policy, targeted at the elimination of environmental threats, at the preservation of residential neighbourhoods, at the elimination of social exclusion and at the integration of urban quarters into global urban spaces (Soóki-Tóth, 2005). However, the decision mechanisms are not perfect, as even in advanced democratic settings the substantive involvement of civil society into decision-making processes, the decisional integration of civil organisations are not guaranteed automatically (Szirmai, 1999).

5 Summary: socially sustainable urban development in the urban centres of East Central Europe

- 1) Several analyses conclude that the development of East Central European cities – although with some delay – is following Western European trends and it differs from them only in some special East Central European features. Thus, the social sustainability problems of urban centres have both similar and differing elements.
- 2) The latest developments of European cities, the global economic, social and spatial processes, the simultaneous mechanisms of European integration are increasing the number of similar elements. This is well discernible by the similar sustainability problems of East Central European urban centres, the differentiated social transformation of central urban quarters, the emergence of gentrification and marginalisation, the manifestations of the “dual city”

concept and the new phenomena of socio-spatial polarisation and social exclusion.

- 3) The contemporary transformation processes of East Central European cities comprise several trends that were typical in the different periods of Western European urban development and in the different historic periods of global urbanisation. But the simultaneity of the modernisation of East Central European cities, of their integration into global economy and their European accession has amplified these tendencies. For this reason the problems of urban social sustainability have had by far larger significance in East Central European cities than in Western Europe.
- 4) The implementation of social sustainability projects in East Central European cities is hindered by the conflicting interests of urban development actors, the weak position of the involved groups, the differentiated enforcement potentials of economic, political and social interests and the weakness of civil society.
- 5) The application of the concept of socially sustainable urban development, the adaptation of successful aspects and experiences with special regard to the specific features of East Central European urban development would be essential for the management of the problems of East Central European urban centres.
- 6) Besides the elements of the socially sustainable urban development concept, direct interventions into the structure of urban society, the practical implementation of complex programmes that would treat not only the local problems of certain urban zones and districts, but could comprehensively manage the problematic issues of whole urban areas is also a key issue with finding preventive instruments against the relocation of socio-spatial problems.

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