

LITERATURE

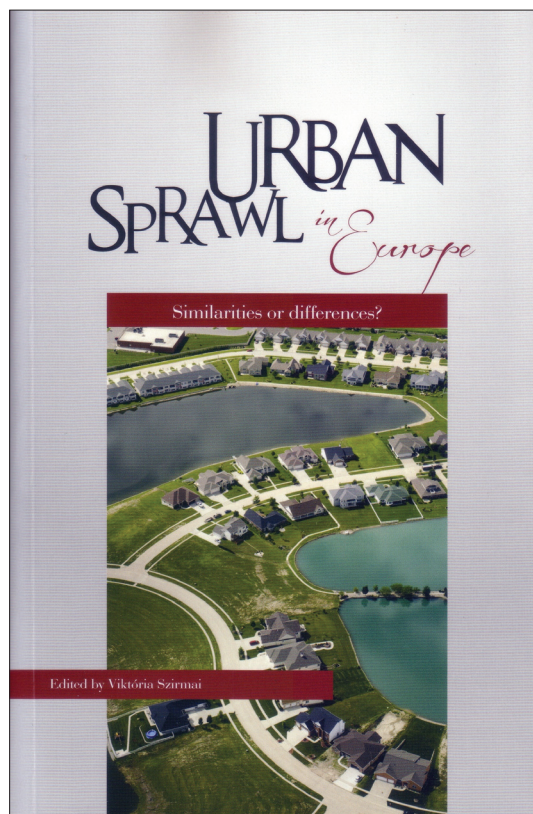
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Szirmai, V. (ed.): *Urban Sprawl in Europe. Similarities or Differences?* Budapest, Aula Kiadó, 2011. 280 p.

Perhaps the two most pervasive phenomena of urban development in western societies have been suburbanisation and gentrification for the last fifty years. In order to find out the relevance of these terms in urban studies I made a web search in *google scholar*. For the terms suburbanisation and sprawl the combined result was over 68 thousand items, whereas for the term gentrification 33,200. Thus, altogether over 100 thousand items in the global academic records can be directly linked to these two concepts. Therefore, we can truly say that *Urban Sprawl in Europe* can draw great attention in the academic sphere and it can extend our knowledge about urban development processes in Europe.

The book consists of three major parts and contains eight chapters. The first part of the book sets the theoretical framework of the topic. In her problem raising introductory chapter Viktória SZIRMAI, editor of the volume, provides an overview about the concep-

tual background of *urban sprawl* and *gentrification*. The process of urban sprawl in Europe followed the North American model with some delay, and it became the dominant urban phenomenon in the western half of the continent only by the 1960s and 70s. The reasons were more or less the same as in the US, growing motorisation, declining housing and environmental quality in the historic inner-cities, endeavour of the middle-class for single family homes etc., nevertheless, the spatial results were different. European suburbs always had settlement history; they were never monofunctional in an American sense, they were organically integrated in the settlement system, and their size and morphological appearance were not comparable to those American dormitory estates. Yet, according to Szirmai there are clear signs of convergence as European and especially East Central European cities now face similar tensions that previously characterised mainly American urban societies.



Our cities have undergone increasing fragmentation, the rise of individualism, the disintegration of community sense and weakening social cohesion, as well as growing segregation of different social strata. These societal trends are coupled with the uncontrolled expansion of the built environment and the shrinkage of natural environment, the shift of investment and consumption from the core city towards the periphery. The reason can be explained with a single word: suburbanisation. In her chapter SZIRMAI not only conceptualise the core topic of the volume, but provides an overview how planning regimes tried to answer the challenges of suburbanisation and urban sprawl from the garden city movement of Ebenezer HOWARD to the current planning instruments applied in different European cities including the Hungarian Act on Spatial Planning in the Agglomeration of Budapest from 2005 and its recent amendments in 2011.

In the final section of the introductory chapter we can read a comparative analysis about the state of the art in the four cities that are subjects of the subsequent chapters of the book: Copenhagen, Paris, Vienna and Budapest. The author concludes that the key terms of urban sprawl and gentrification need to be considered more as complementary concepts, which together can help us to understand and explain the socio-spatial rearrangements of contemporary European cities.

The second chapter of the book provides the wider theoretical background of the book. In his conceptual paper György ENYEDI briefly summarizes and comments the characteristic features of the stage model of modern urbanisation. The phenomenon of urban sprawl can fit into the second stage of the model, whereas gentrification can be linked to the fourth i.e. re-urbanisation. ENYEDI not only describes the main features of the different stages but explains their underpinning mechanisms in a comparative manner. Arriving at the most recent stage of global urban development he clearly expresses his criticism: "I have never accepted this fourth stage".

According to ENYEDI moving back to the city centres meant rather a rearrangement within the population of urban agglomeration than a new growth stage. Indeed, unlike the previous three stages of urbanisation which spread from their origin to other parts of the world over several decades, the so-called re-urbanisation stage did not mean an abrupt change in the concentration or de-concentration processes of labour force and jobs within urban regions. ENYEDI explains the renewed growth of city centres by the *urbanisation of globalisation*. According to his concept globalisation and the emergence of global economy gives rise to new growth centres that are normally located in the heart of global cities attracting knowledge-based branches of the economy and their highly skilled workforce, the *creative class*. At the same time ENYEDI also makes self-critique and modifies his earlier assumption linking the return of people and jobs to the city centres with the spread of IT sector. I found his writing a marvellous example how academics should critically revise their concepts and opinions from time to time.

The second part of the book focuses on the versatile process of urban sprawl in four European metropolises: *Copenhagen, Paris, Vienna and Budapest*. These cities followed distinct historical pathways which left their imprints on their current socio-spatial structure. They also represent different urban cultures and planning traditions which enable the reader to get a comprehensive picture about the core topic of the book.

The third chapter of the book is a masterpiece shedding light to the genesis of urban sprawl, its influencing factors and outcomes in Denmark. In their lyric paper Henrik REEH and Martin ZERLANG approach the main topic of the book in a highly sophisticated and artistic manner. First the so-called *Fingerplan strategy* is introduced that intended to earmark the axes of urban development around Copenhagen as early as 1947–1948. There were hardly any signs of suburbanisation around post-war Copenhagen at that time but

Steen Eiler RASMUSSEN, chairman of the Fingerplan Commission and hence father of the strategy set the main directions of future urban development. In the subsequent decades the city and its agglomeration developed according to these guidelines in full harmony. The author Martin ZERLANG could personally follow the aftermath of the Fingerplan as young resident of *Farum*, a quickly growing suburban settlement at the tip of the second finger. His fascinating tale is full of personal impressions, emotions, and anecdotes from that period making the story very enjoyable.

The second part of the paper discusses two ongoing large-scale urban planning projects that are aimed to harmonize urban sprawl and sustainability around Copenhagen: the *Køge Kyst* and the *Ørestad* projects. Both of them intend to reduce the psychological boundary between the capital city and the rest of the country, to improve living conditions and to harmonise spatial development within the agglomeration of Copenhagen that would, according to the expectations, lead to increasing competitiveness of the city within the European and global urban system. Coming from a country where planning in general has a stigma, and often considered as a communist type of intervention in our daily life, I was amazed to read the highly sophisticated examples of Danish planning practice.

The case study on Paris from Nadine CATTAN gives statistical evidence that even though the first phase of suburbanisation around the French capital could already be detected in the 1960s, its peak coincided with the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the process is not yet over. In the last half a century suburbanisation took different directions around Paris and it has different speed, but it has not stopped yet. I think this is a clear message for 'model makers' that urban development is a more complicated issue than one would believe and a couple of indicators is not enough to give convincing explanations for the growth or shrinkage of our cities. The author provides accurate analysis about the population dynamics of different urban zones in the Paris metropolitan area; she studies the changes of land use and their environmental consequences. As a reader I found most interesting her gender related analysis about commuting behaviour of residents around Paris pointing out the process of '*spatial entrapment*'.

Similarly to Paris, the case study on Vienna also confirms that urban sprawl and gentrification go hand in hand today. Peter GÖRGL, Marco HELBICH, Walter MATZNETTER and Heinz FASSMANN analyse the population dynamics in the metropolitan area of Vienna putting emphasis not only on the level of growth but also on the demographic aspects of population change. As they conclude patterns of suburbanisation and re-urbanisation can be observed side by side in the city and its surroundings. According to their expectations suburbanisation will remain an important factor of urban development in Vienna in the coming years. They also point out one specific character of Vienna. Unlike most European urban regions Vienna does not face any risk of shrinkage. It is projected for the next decades that both the city proper and the agglomeration will experience a continual population growth in the future, partly as a consequence of international migration.

Finally, the fourth case study explores the process of urban sprawl and its socio-spatial consequences in the Budapest metropolitan region. Viktória Szirmai and her co-authors put the emphasis on the social consequences of urban sprawl around the Hungarian capital city in their case study. Basis of the investigation is a representative questionnaire survey and in depth interviews carried out in Budapest and its agglomeration. Qualitative data confirm that socio-spatial disparities among different types of settlements of the urban region have been increasing in the last two decades. Although disparities do not show the *dichotomy* typical in the west, nevertheless the processes leading to dichotomy are already visible.

The third part of the book focuses less on urban sprawl, but its complementary process: *gentrification*. Yvonne FRANZ reports on the social consequences of urban renewal in

Vienna. She concludes that compared to other cities in the world the risk of gentrification is generally lower in the Austrian capital mainly because of the strong control and influence of local state through a well developed social housing system. FRANZ points out initial pockets of gentrification in the urban fabric and she carefully analyses them as case studies. Her investigations confirm that gentrification became really a complex phenomenon by now, with many different forms and faces. An interesting result of her study is the introduction of the concept of *state-led gentrification*. This is very similar to the state of the art in many post-socialist cities, including Budapest. In this respect we can grasp certain similarities in the gentrification process of the two former *K und K* capital cities.

The final chapter of the book deals with different practices of urban renewal and their social consequences in the inner-city of Budapest. In the empirical part of the paper GÁBOR CSANÁDI and his co-authors first investigates core areas of urban renewal in the inner part of the city as possible places of gentrification, then they sharpen the focus of analysis using Inner-Erzsébetváros as a case-study. The lessons from Budapest clearly show that gentrification under post-socialist circumstances differ from the western model in many respect. The reasons are manifold: the low level of demand on the housing market, the lack of private rental sector, and the relative lack of gentrifiers. This result should remind us at least two things. First, gentrification has become a container concept in the western literature by now meaning a lot of different changes in inner-city neighbourhoods. Secondly, concepts applied in the west are not always applicable for other cities, like post-socialist cities. The one size fits all concept is, therefore, misleading.

To sum up, I found the eight chapters of this book highly informative and stimulating and I strongly recommend this book for all those academics and stakeholders beyond the academia who are interested in urban studies and would like to know more about the complex nature of urban development of our age.

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