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New urban living and mobility

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Abstract

Some cities across Europe currently experience new growth. Especially the inner-city areas are regaining their attractiveness as a residential area together with an influx of new residents and a diversification of the population structure (Herfert/Osterhage 2012; Haase/Kabisch 2010; Buzar et al. 2007). This process of urban population growth and change is oftentimes accompanied by an extension of the housing stock and the construction of new residential neighbourhoods within the existing built structure. Among these offers are new concepts for urban living that target specific demands of the residents and that potentially prevent urban sprawl and further suburbanization. The questions addressed in this article are which households relocate to these areas, what their motives are and how new urban development influences daily mobility. While it is established that compact mixed-use spatial structure rather supports low shares of motorized transport and short trip length, it is far from clear whether this is the case for new centrally located but rather low density areas. The results of a case study in Berlin suggest that this new type of urban living mostly attracts highly educated families with relatively high incomes. Residents mainly moved from other inner-city areas within Berlin to this newly developed location. The importance of some typically 'suburban' motives - a bigger apartment and a garden - for the decision to relocate indicates that new residents may have otherwise chosen to move out from the city centre. Daily mobility of residents is characterized by a rather high use of active modes such as walking and biking compared to the inner city population in general. Car use is about comparable despite a very high rate of car ownership. Overall, the study suggests that new inner city development, although with low density provides opportunities for sustainable mobility. At the same time, the potential of the area is far from being fully exploited.

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Keywords: Reurbanisation; new inner-city areas; residential preferences; daily mobility

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1. Introduction

For decades people across Europe have moved to suburbia, while in contrast inner cities have lost attractiveness and population. More recently, there are indications that households seem to be rediscovering the qualities of inner-city living (e.g. Geppert and Gornig 2003, Brühl et al. 2005). A visible sign of this 'urban renaissance' and one of its physical expressions is the recent rise of new residential housing estates in central locations. Several cities in Europe have over the last years seen such large-scale developments, often located on former industrial areas or brownfields (Spaans 2004, BBSR 2012). These projects suggest living in the inner city is in vogue again.

Scientific and political debates around these new inner-city redevelopments have been paying attention to this phenomenon. One topic concerns the underlying socio-demographic dynamics. Several studies (e.g. Kabisch and Haase 2011, Siedentop 2008) have analysed the quantitative dimension of inner-city population trends and shifts in comparison to suburban locations. More qualitative work has tried to understand for whom, and why, new inner-city residential development is becoming attractive again (Frank 2011, Karsten 2007, Haase et al 2010). Furthermore, some studies have examined displacement effects associated with social and economic 'qualification' that follows new development projects (Boddy 2007, Holm 2010, Davidson and Lees 2009).

A second issue with respect to new development projects is their role as part of intentional political strategies for urban renewal and economic revitalisation of run-down inner-city locations. In this context, they are interpreted as an expression of the normative goal of an 'entrepreneurial state' (Hall and Hubbard 1996) to attract households to the inner city, in particular groups with higher spending power (Doucet 2010). Likewise, the debate touches on the motivation and marketing strategies of real estate developers and their important role for creating new forms of urbanity (e.g. Füller et al 2013).

The focus of this article is related to a third and perhaps less well-studied issue: the potential of new urban residential development to reduce the negative environmental effects of human activity in cities. Connected to concepts like 'new urbanism' or the 'smart city', studies have investigated how the design, technology and regulation of urban projects support objectives to reduce energy consumption, travel and emissions (Foletta and Field 2011). The potential of such projects to shape 'sustainable' mobility patterns is a particularly prominent aspect of this discussion. Their central location, density and mix of uses can provide the preconditions for short-distance commuting to work and trips to other destinations. Moreover, high accessibility to transit, favourable design and supportive regulation (like demand management) enable residents to make routine trips with convenient public transport, on foot or by bike – thus offering alternatives to the car.

Using the development area Alter Schlachthof in Berlin as a case study, this paper investigates the linkages between the decision of households to move into new urban areas and their daily mobility. The main questions are:

- For which households and people are the new inner-city development areas an attractive location and what are their main characteristics (socio-economic and demographic variables as well as mobility resources)?
- How does the daily mobility of the new residents at Alter Schlachthof compare with daily mobility in the inner city?
- What are the households' motives to move to this area? To what extent are mobility-related motives relevant?
- What (general) lessons can urban planning and regulation draw from new urban living?

The following section provides a brief overview of the state of the art concerning the relation between urban form and travel behavior (section 2). Section 3 describes the research area and the data sets that are used to answer the research questions. Then, the main findings of the case study are presented (section 4) and discussed (section 5). A concluding section considers the implications of the research for urban planning and regulation (section 6).

2. Urban form and travel behavior

Existing studies suggest that urban form, along with sociodemographic characteristics influences travel behavior (e.g. Harms et al. 2007, Buehler 2011, Naess 2012, Cervero/Kockelmann 1997, Ewing/Cervero 2010). Urban land use structures and locations with a high population density, a high mix and distribution of uses and good access to the city center imply shorter average distances between residences, workplaces and service facilities and are