



Diversity in the suburbs: Socio-spatial segregation and mix in post-socialist Sofia



Diliana Daskalova*, Aleksandar D. Slaev

Faculty of Architecture, Varna Free University, Yanko Slavchev Street, 9007 Varna, Bulgaria

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 March 2015

Received in revised form

14 July 2015

Accepted 16 July 2015

Available online 31 July 2015

Keywords:

Post-socialism

Suburbanization

Socio-spatial segregation

Social mix

Bulgaria

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the post-socialist transition, most large East European cities could easily be differentiated from their Western counterparts in that they lacked rings of affluent suburbs in the periphery (Haussermann, 1996; Hirt, 2007a). Socialist-era city edges were subject to stringent planning control; they were typically marked by large, socially homogenous socialist panel-housing estates and well-defined urban boundaries, beyond which lay a rural periphery of modest villages. Following the fall of socialism, rings of suburbs began to emerge in and around large cities of the former Soviet Bloc. Studies have shown that in many cases, post-socialist suburbanization has been fueled by the relocation of upper-class households in pursuit of higher residential standards, lower densities, and lush natural environments (Krisjane & Berzins, 2012; Stanilov, 2007). Thus researchers have perceived the trends in post-socialist cities as following the patterns of intra-urban suburbanization common in Western metropolises, albeit with a significant delay (Hirt, 2007a; Nedovic-Budic & Tsenkova, 2006, chap. 1; Stanilov, 2007).

* Corresponding author. Present address: Mladost II, Block 208A, Apt. 8, 1799 Sofia, Bulgaria.

E-mail addresses: ddhirt@vt.edu (D. Daskalova), slaev@vfu.bg (A.D. Slaev).

However, suburbanization in many parts of the world has been fueled by at least one other type of migration—rural-to-urban (Dias, 1990; Krisjane & Berzins, 2012). This type of suburban development typically houses lower-income groups, whose relocation to the urban periphery is fueled not by ambition to improve their lifestyles but rather by a search for opportunities in proximity to the city. Both phenomena can contribute to socio-spatial segregation in the urban periphery.

In Sofia, research has focused almost exclusively on upper-class suburban development in Sofia's attractive southern periphery. In this work, we expand the area of study to include the entire urban periphery. The aim of this research is to examine the differences between new residents in different parts of the periphery and find out whether suburbanization leads to socio-spatial segregation—a well-known phenomenon in Western cities.

This study of contemporary suburbanization in Sofia begins with a review of literature on suburbanization in relevant contexts. We then use the results of a survey conducted in early 2014 on specific characteristics of Sofia's new southern and northern suburban residents. The survey structure is based upon that of an earlier study, which provides a basis for comparison with present findings. Census data is presented to show the extent of socio-spatial segregation (or mix) at district and neighborhood levels. The findings of our research indicate that migrants to Sofia's northern urban periphery differ from those in the southern periphery (the Vitosha footlands). We conclude that the resulting social structure in Sofia's suburbs is generally less segregated than in the West, at least so far. Especially at the district level, trends indicate a higher social mix. Yet certain forms of socio-spatial segregation, such as gated housing, are emerging.

2. Theoretical and historical background

2.1. Post-war suburbanization in Europe

Two main types of suburbanization emerged in post-World War II West European societies. The first type, intra-urban migration, involves middle- and upper-class households that relocate from the inner city to the urban periphery for a quieter, more luxurious life in the suburbs. This phenomenon of upper-class suburbanization characterized urban development in many Western metropolises

throughout the last century (Fishman, 1987; Jackson, 1985). Intra-city migrants seek to escape urban density by relocating to manicured “bedroom” subdivisions composed primarily of the homes of residents who commute elsewhere for work. These migrants in effect seclude themselves in socially homogenous subdivisions. In Europe, this model of the suburb as a “bourgeois escape” from the city is much more prevalent in the north than in the south (Keil, 2013).

In many Western nations, there have also been migrations of lower classes to the suburbs, a trend associated with the era of industrialization but still prevalent in southern European urban metropolises (Leontidou, 1990; Patacchini & Zenou, 2009). In this type of suburbanization, called rural-to-urban migration, marginalized people—typically poorer immigrants and rural migrants in search of livelihood—move to the city periphery in hopes of improving their chances of survival (Hirt, 2007a; Leontidou, 1990). Rather than seeking to escape the city, these suburbanites hope to find opportunities near it. Both brands of market-driven suburbanization have the propensity to segregate poorer from richer groups in the city periphery and can create places of socio-spatial segregation.

The peri-urban structures that emerged in post-war Central and Eastern Europe were quite different from those emerging in Western Europe after World War II. Whereas urban development in the West was largely a product of market-based supply and demand, in the socialist countries strict, centralized control coupled with prefabricated construction technologies permitted the rapid and widespread development of large-scale state panel housing in the city periphery (Hirt, 2007b; Slaev, 2014).

Like other European capitals in the post-war period, socialist Sofia was characterized by intense migration from rural areas toward cities. To meet the burgeoning demand for housing, state planners provided apartments to growing numbers of urban dwellers by constructing compact mass-housing estates towards the edge of the city limits. Outside these boundaries (in suburban areas), the municipality maintained a conservative policy towards individual development, effectively restricting housing construction. Thus, despite the rapid influx of population from the countryside, construction outside of the city limits comprised just one-fifth of total development (NSI, 2012).

Sofia's socialist-era residential complexes had an exceptionally diverse demographic and social residential makeup, relative to the Western suburban enclaves (Hirt & Stanilov, 2007, chap. 11). The inability to express individual housing preferences in effect thwarted the primary mechanisms that could have produced marginalizing suburbanization and the emergence of affluent or impoverished enclaves in the peri-urban zone—the type of suburbanization commonly found in market-driven societies. Instead, Bulgarian municipal authorities envisioned polycentric, socialist-type suburbs for the growing urban middle class (Kovachev, 2005; Slaev & Kovachev, 2014).

2.2. Contemporary trends in the transitional period

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, urban development policies were reversed. The ensuing period of transition constituted a reorientation towards Western values, democracy, and free-market rule. This shift has brought with it new patterns of urban (and suburban) development throughout Central and Eastern Europe, including in Bulgaria and its capital city. As a result, many of the socialist-era complexes have fallen into physical disrepair.

With the deregulation of the land market, urban development became a product of market-based supply and demand as opposed to tight central planning. Once restrictions on individual housing construction were lifted, consumers could express their demand

for different types of housing (Nedovic-Budic, 2001). The newfound freedom to express housing preferences brought with it a shift away from socialist housing and towards individual housing construction in the urban periphery. Perhaps because living in uniform, collectivist socialist housing was compulsory for so many decades, residents of post-socialist cities were drawn towards less dense housing forms and more private environments. This shift has been extensively documented in the capitals of Central-European countries (e.g., on Prague, see Stanilov & Sykora, 2012; on Budapest, see Kok & Kovacs, 1999; Timar & Varadi, 2001). Similar but fewer studies have also been conducted in south-eastern Europe (Hirt, 2007a, 2007b; Nedovic-Budic & Tsenkova, 2006, chap. 1).

Studies of Sofia have also shown a trend towards accelerated intra-urban residential decentralization since the fall of socialism. Once the restrictions on peri-urban development were lifted, affluent buyers in Sofia quickly reoriented themselves towards the new real estate in the southern city periphery and more individualized housing forms. A rapid process of upper-class residential decentralization—suburbanization in its Western sense—became visible (Hirt, 2007a, 2007b; Slaev & Nikiforov, 2013).

An evaluation of population data derived from the 2011 census reveals the uneven nature of growth in Sofia's urban periphery. In order to monitor the flow of residents to Sofia's outskirts, the urban periphery is divided into northern and southern peripheral municipal districts. Fig. 1 depicts the southern districts of Ovcha Kupel, Bankya, Vitosha and Pancharevo and the northern districts of Vrabnica, Novi Iskar and the formerly industrial district of Kremikovci. Table 1 depicts suburban population growth in these districts, beginning in the late socialist period and through the first decade of the transitional period.

Note that while most of the land in Ovcha kupel and Vrabnica is suburban, some of it is urban. Most of the population in these districts is urban, 90% and 98% respectively (NSI, 2012). This is due to the mass residential housing estates developed in these districts during the 1980s, which explains their high rates of growth from 1984 to 1992.

The growth experienced in Sofia's southern urban periphery during the transitional period has thus far greatly exceeded that of other peripheral regions. Population influxes followed a path from the city center towards the suburban districts. Typically, it was wealthier, inner-city residents who moved to the southern periphery in order to attain a higher standard of living and customized housing styles. Studies show that only 8% of Vitosha's newcomers moved from elsewhere in the country (Hirt, 2007a). The new residents in these districts shared many other social and demographic characteristics with “typical” intra-urban migrants of the 20th century in the global North and West (Hirt, 2007a, 2007b; Slaev & Nikiforov, 2013). Thus, intra-urban migration in Sofia's southern urban periphery has been consistent with the dominant trend in other large, post-socialist cities. In Vitosha, 40% of the participant newcomers had an annual income four times greater than the average Bulgarian's (in 2006, the year of the survey). Newcomers typically commuted to the inner city for work. While a full one-third of the long-time residents worked within or near the peripheral area where they lived, only one-tenth of the newcomers did.

Suburban districts to the north experienced decline in the 1990s and began to grow only after 2001 (NSI, 2012). As Table 1 shows, the greatest population decreases in Novi Iskar and Kremikovci occurred during the years 1992–2001. Recent statistics indicate that of the 28 suburban settlements in the northern districts of Sofia, the populations of 9 settlements have decreased, the populations of 3 have not changed, and the populations of 16 have grown between 2003 and 2011 (NSI, 2009, pp. 29–30; NSI 2012, pp.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7455809>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7455809>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)