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Housing Estates in the Czech Republic after Socialism: Various Trajectories and Inner Differentiation

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Abstract

Growing income differentiation in society, diversification of housing supply and selective population mobility are resulting in increasing socio-spatial differentiation in Czech cities and neighbourhoods during the post-socialist transition. Housing estates are no exception to the processes of urban change. The paper shows that development trajectories of housing estates vary in different parts of the country, in various locations within each city and also within particular housing estates. As segregation in Czech cities takes place mainly at a very small scale, statistical analyses usually fail to detect the seeds of social and physical degradation emerging in neighbourhoods and a micro-scale survey is essential. In order to understand the patterns and factors of differentiation the paper presents case studies from housing estates located in different cities of the Czech Republic.

Key words

housing estates; social and physical differentiation; post-socialist transformation; risk processes; segregation

Introduction

Housing estates were the dominant type of housing constructed during the socialist era and make up 20 to 40 per cent of housing stock in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, whereas they are estimated to account only for 3 to 7 per cent in Western Europe (Enyedi, 1998, Tosics, 2004, Dimitrovska Andrews, 2005). In the socialist city many housing estates were socially mixed areas with a large proportion of families with children. The high-rise schemes built in Western cities in the post-war period, on the other hand, were usually intended for immigrants and low income groups (Friedrichs *et al.*, 2003). The new processes of post-socialist transformation are contributing to an increasing differentiation of cities and neighbourhoods. Social and spatial polarization has been reflected in growing socio-economic residential differentiation in CEE cities (Enyedi, 1998, Kovács, 1999, Sailer-Fliege, 1999, Ruoppila and

Kährlik, 2003). In the 1990s many voices in the academic and public spheres warned against the social and physical degradation of housing estates in post-socialist cities (Szelényi, 1996, Enyedi, 1998). Although there are many problems facing large-scale prefabricated housing estates today, it is not generally a case of the depopulation, abandonment and social degradation that is in, for example, many East German cities (Häußermann, 1996, Harth *et al.*, 1998, Mäding, 2003, Glock and Häußermann, 2004). Housing estates in different countries and regions and in various locations in cities have experienced different development trajectories during the post-socialist transition and in some of them the risk of social and physical degradation has become more real.

In the Czech Republic, almost one third of the population lives in socialist high-rise buildings constructed since the mid 1950s. Not much is known, however, about how the residential environment and composition of the population in housing estates have changed during the post-socialist transition. This paper aims to describe and evaluate the differential development of the social and physical environment of housing estates in the Czech Republic. It is assumed that housing estates differ in their composition and their development trajectories vary in different regions, cities and neighbourhoods in the country. Therefore geographical scale matters and the differentiation of housing estates needs to be examined between regions and cities, within cities, and within particular housing estates. From the perspective of social geography and spatial structure of cities we believe that there are several risk processes threatening the development of housing estates in post-socialistic cities. The paper raises a question of how the risk processes (social degradation, demographic ageing, physical downgrading) gain ground in the development and differentiation of the social and physical environment of housing estates in the Czech Republic. The paper demonstrates empirically how the risk processes operate in various types of housing estates in different conditions and local contexts. We suggest that there is a set of factors working on different geographical scales (region, city, and neighbourhood) and influencing the selective development of risk processes in particular housing estates.

Methodologically the paper emphasizes case study research, which at its best illustrates various situations in distinct types of housing estates in the country. Comparative case studies within the same national context, as Abu-Lughod (2007) pointed out, help to identify important variations not only in situations, but also in conditions of development at local and regional levels.

The paper starts with an outline of the main features and risk processes that characterize the development of the social and physical environment of housing estates in Central and Eastern Europe during the transition from state socialist to post-socialist conditions of urban development. From there the attention moves to the differentiation of housing estates in specific regions and cities in the Czech Republic. Three distinct development scenarios in contemporary housing estates are introduced. Finally it is argued that housing estates also undergo significant social and physical transformation at the micro-level of particular blocks of flats and neighbourhood units. Since segregation in Czech cities is mainly at the level of houses or building clusters, micro-level analysis not only helps to detect seeds of poverty in neighbourhoods, but also shows how the risk processes operate in particular housing estates within a particular local context.

Risk processes in post-socialist housing estates

Since 1989 residential differentiation has increased considerably in the majority of post-socialist cities (Musil, 1993, Andrusz *et al.*, 1996, Häußermann, 1996, Węclawowicz, 1996, Enyedi, 1998, Eckardt, 2006). Hand in hand with socio-spatial change has come a great interest on the part of social sciences in the description and evaluation of new social and economic processes in urban settings (Musil and Illner, 1994, Kostinskiy, 2001, Musil, 2002, Tsenkova, Nedović-Budić, 2006). Of these processes commercialization, gentrification, suburbanization and international migration play the prime role (Cochrane and Jonas, 1999, Dingsdale, 1999, Valkanov, 2005, Borén and Gentile, 2007). The growing intensity of the differentiation processes has aroused increasing concerns about future development in certain parts of urban areas, particularly in inner cities, housing estates and suburban settlements on the periphery of metropolitan regions. However, the starting position of these areas differed significantly at the end of socialism. Musil (1993, p. 901) argues that during socialism “*old people and low-income households were more concentrated (even trapped) in the deteriorating city centres, and gypsies in many old residential areas in central urban zones*” while “*new housing estates in Czechoslovakia and East Germany (but not in Poland and Hungary) showed a relatively high degree of social heterogeneity*”. All these endangered urban areas have changed considerably since the Velvet Revolution, but the trajectories of their development have taken various directions. The physical and social revitalization of inner city quarters and the dynamic development of suburban housing transformed previously neglected parts of cities into attractive places for more affluent residents (Kostinskiy, 2001, Steinführer and Haase, 2007). Some of these people came from worse

housing, particularly from socialist housing estates (Valkanov, 2005, Ouředníček, 2007a). The escape of better-off households leads both scholars and governments at various levels to perceive housing estates as problematic areas within cities (Szelényi, 1996, Sailer-Fliege, 1999, Dekker and van Kempen, 2004, Glock and Häußermann, 2004).

Several topics, more or less common to all transforming post-socialist European countries, are discussed in relation to the changing social and physical environment of housing estates. Of these we identified three general risk processes which have a considerable influence on the contemporary development of the Czech housing estates. Firstly, the threat of a massive outflow of better off and more educated people from housing estates and their consequential social degradation or ghettoisation (due to a concentration of the Roma community, socially disadvantaged households or international migrants) is a common theme of sociological and geographical contributions (Maier, 1997, Musil, 2002, Ouředníček, 2007b). Secondly, demographic aging of the estates' population or, more generally, the problem of an unbalanced age structure of housing estates with a significant impact on social and technical infrastructure, is more articulated in the Czech Republic compared to post-socialist literature (Maier, 1997, Stojanová and Kalvach, 2001). Thirdly, the poor technical and architectural condition of panel-built blocks of flats and the poor residential environment of housing estates is often discussed not only by academics and professionals, but also by politicians and the media. It has raised the question of the future sustainability of housing estates and has aroused different opinions from demolition to humanisation and regeneration of housing estates (Maier, 1997, Egedy, 2000, Tosics, 2005, Constantin, 2007).

Social degradation

The housing system in former socialist countries was based on state ownership, publicly controlled distribution and centrally planned production, which all diminished the operation of market mechanisms in housing (Clapham, 1995, Kovács, 1999, Kostinskiy, 2001). The housing market was basically limited to a mutual exchange of apartments or to the purchase of a weekend house. New housing construction was supplied by the state panel housing programme. Consequently, residential mobility was very low under socialism (Struyk, 1996, Musil, 2002, Ruoppila, 2004). Spatial distribution of high- and low-income households was only moderately influenced by land prices and location within the cities. As a result, housing estates were a mixture of people with diverse socioeconomic statuses rather than homogenous territorial units.

After 1990, new economic and political processes brought changes in the housing market as well as in the stratification of society. As many scholars pointed out, growing social stratification and purchasing power of some households resulted in higher residential mobility (Pichler-Milanovich, 1994, Daniell and Struyk, 1997, Maier, 1997). However, this process is highly selective and although the inhabitants of housing estates are the most likely to migrate out of their places of residence, only some of them can afford to do so (Musil, 2002, Matlovič and Sedláková, 2006). A small number of affluent households left the housing estates immediately after the change of the socialist regime to move to better and more expensive housing in the new suburban areas or in the revitalized central and inner parts of cities (Černič Mali *et al.*, 2003, Valkanov, 2005). The subsequent introduction of mortgages has opened up a wider supply of housing to middle class households as well, some of whom have become new suburbanites (Erdősi *et al.* 2003, Marin, 2005, Leetmaa and Tammaru, 2007, Ouředníček, 2007a). On the other hand, socially disadvantaged people are often trapped in pockets of poverty located in various parts of post-socialist cities (Ladányi, 1993). Residential mobility of disadvantaged social groups as well as of many elderly people and young families has decreased during the transformation period as they have been able to operate only within a small segment of the housing market (Valkanov, 2005, Lux, 2007).

The formation of areas perceived as “good addresses” (villa quarters, gentrified zones, suburbia) on the one hand and the out-flow of more affluent people from housing estates and derelict dwellings in inner cities on the other have created a new polarized pattern of residential differentiation. Housing estates are among the least preferred housing options (Drbohlav, 1993, Matlovič, Sedláková, 2006). Selective migration indicates a process of residential succession and social filtering down with a negative impact mainly on housing estates (Wießner, 1999, Tosics, 2004).

Growing international migration and the inflow of foreign workers and ethnic minorities in more developed countries of Central and Eastern Europe have also created a demand for housing in cheaper apartments on housing estates. As a consequence, the first small ethnic enclaves have emerged and ethnically based segregation has become more obvious in post-socialist cities (Ladányi, 1993, Gentile and Tammaru, 2006). The increasing presence of Roma people, Vietnamese, Ukrainians and Russians are typical examples of the new ethnic diversification of the Czech housing estate population (Drbohlav *et al.*, 2007). The clearest example of this is the situation in the former GDR, where *Gastarbeiters* (guest workers) and other migrants partly

compensate for the outflow of younger and better educated people from housing estates (Rueschemeyer, 1993, Kemper, 1998, Häußermann and Kapphan, 2005). In this respect, today's housing estates can be viewed as new transition zones, in the sense of Burgess' ecological model.

Demographic aging

Nagy (2001) sees elderly people generally as losers in the post-socialist transformation. Empirical research from Prague confirmed that retired people in older housing estates have much lower spatial mobility (Mášková and Turba, 1986) and can, in the future, be easily trapped in the worsening physical and social environment of housing estates (see also Musterd and van Kempen, 2007). Most of them have little chance of either resettling in other areas of cities (Maier, 1997), of returning back to the countryside (Kovács, 1999, Kok, 2000, Brown and Schafft, 2002), or of migrating to the suburbs (Ouředníček, 2007a).

In the socialist era, housing estates were heterogeneous in terms of their inhabitants' social status, the demographic structure was largely homogenous; young families with children in particular made up a substantial share of housing estate residents (Musil, 1968). Nuclear families (parents and their children) established a specific two-generation age structure common to most of the housing estates in the Czech Republic (Musil *et al.*, 1985) and there was a similar situation in other European housing estates (Musil, 2002). Although the consequences of demographic aging are strongly evident throughout society (modifications in the pension system and employment policy, growing demand for social infrastructure etc.), the consequences are especially clear in synchronously aging housing estates (Maier, 1997, Stojanová and Kalvach, 2001). Demographic aging of inhabitants is strengthened by the gradual outflow of educated young people, which has worsened the demographic and socio-economic structure of some housing estates (Mládek *et al.*, 1998, Erdösi *et al.*, 2003, Ouředníček, 2007a).

Having gone through a series of neighbourhood life cycle stages with an ageing cohort of residents (Murie *et al.*, 2003), the first generation of high-rise blocks of flats from the 1950s and 1960s now houses a large elderly population. Moreover, a sudden change in the economic structure of the estates' population is occurring as substantial generations of initial settlers reach the end of their economic activity and retire (Temelová *et al.*, 2007). Consequently, housing estates already are or in near future will be facing several serious problems concerning the concentration of an aging population. Considering their necessarily decreasing purchase power,

the local population of elderly people may not be able to meet housing costs (Erdösi *et al.*, 2003). The subsequent lack of maintenance and investment in repairs may lead to physical degradation of housing stock (Dimitrovska Andrews, 2005). In addition, demographic aging of the local population changes the demand for certain goods and services. Stojanová and Kalvach (2001) argue that because of low interest in the issues of seniors on the municipal level, there is a risk of a shortage of institutional facilities and field services. We believe that in the case of Czech housing estates, the decline in socio-economic status *in situ* (elderly residents who are becoming poorer) may be as serious as the inflow of poor people from outside to the housing estates.

Physical downgrading

The problems related to the physical condition of housing estates have been present since they were built. Above all the poor urbanistic quality, monotonous design and uniformity, monofunctionality, the lack of public spaces, recreational facilities and safety are highlighted by the critics (Musil, 2002, Černič Mali *et al.*, 2003, Murie *et al.*, 2003, Tosics, 2005). In contrast to the original plans the estates lacked an adequate social infrastructure and service provision (shopping centres, sufficient capacity of primary schools) for a long time after the construction of residential buildings (Musil *et al.*, 1985). Due to the lack of maintenance and repairs in the socialist and post-socialist era, many of the housing estates have gradually deteriorated in most CEE cities (Murie *et al.*, 2003, Dimitrovska Andrews, 2005, Tosics, 2005). Physical obsolescence relates not only to buildings (e.g. low energy efficiency, poor technical quality), but also to neglected public spaces (Dimitrovska Andrews, 2005). There is a general consensus that the physical condition of housing estates needs to be improved, with the main arguments being the negative effects of further physical decline on social cohesion in housing estates and the discouragement of economic investors in the city (Wießner, 1999, Murie *et al.*, 2003).

Privatisation of housing stock built by the state during the socialist era provided a significant impulse for housing regeneration. It started in the first half of the 1990s and became the dominant theme in the reform of housing policy in Central and Eastern Europe (Baross and Struyk, 1993, Clapham, 1995, Marcuse, 1996, Hegedüs and Tosics, 1998). According to Clapham (1995, see also Hegedüs and Tosics, 1998) privatization was meant, among other things, as a mechanism to stimulate owners to pay for housing maintenance and to prevent housing estates from further deterioration. In fact, the privatization process generated different effects in various housing estates. In better-off estates, it did in fact lead to renovation and better

maintenance of residential buildings, but in other areas new home owners were not able to meet the operating and maintenance costs (Černič Mali *et al.*, 2003, Dimitrovska Andrews, 2005), which led to further physical degradation.

At the beginning of the 1990s several plans for radical solutions to the “panel problem” appeared. However, pulling down substantial parts of housing estates was very soon recognised as unrealistic since approximately one third of the population lives in housing estates in post-socialist countries (Murie *et al.*, 2003, Dimitrovska Andrews, 2005). The main attention of policy-makers on state and local levels has thus been aimed at improving the physical and social environment; i.e. regeneration (Maier, 1997, Glock and Häußermann, 2004, Tosics, 2004), humanisation or rehabilitation (Musil, 2002, Vesselinov and Logan, 2005, Constantin, 2007). The lack of finance for complex regeneration of housing estates remains a crucial problem. Regeneration is mostly limited to physical renovation of panel houses (e.g. insulation, technical infrastructure, windows), while a systematic approach to the surrounding greenery, public buildings and space is generally lacking (Temelová *et al.*, 2007). In East Germany, however, the only post-socialist country with real and extensive practice in regeneration, the massive investment did not stop the outflow of better-off households and the policy of demolishing vacant buildings tended to be seen as the best solution to the “housing estate problem” (Glock and Häußermann, 2004, Tosics, 2004).

Research methods and data

Since the paper aims to illustrate the differentiation of social and physical environment of housing estates on three scale levels, the research calls for the use of various information sources and complementary methodological approaches, from statistical analysis to qualitative investigation. On the macro-level, differentiation of housing estates in cities in the Czech Republic is examined using statistical data. The statistics mainly depict the economic situation of cities and regions, particularly the unemployment rate (Czech Statistical Office, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) and real estate prices (IRI – Institute of Regional Information). To sketch various development scenarios of housing estates on the mezzo-level (i.e. within one city), both statistical data and case study research are applied. The statistical data provide a basic characterization of selected housing estates (average age, unemployment rate, university education based on data from Czech Statistical Office). In addition, an internet survey of housing prices was carried out for selected housing estates (due to the unavailability of data for required

spatial units). The sale offers for standard flats¹ were monitored via several important real estate servers for a period of one month (October 2007) to calculate the average price for standard flat in the each housing estate. The first development scenario of Czech housing estates, exemplified in Prague, is also based on statistics, particularly on in depth migration data. The unique data set provided by Czech Statistical Office covers each individual move and its attributes in Prague in the period from 1995 to 2003 (only available for the capital city). Apparently, statistical analysis alone is not sufficient to understand differentiation on lower spatial levels (mezzo- and especially micro-level). It usually fails to detect pockets of social and physical degradation and small-grained differentiation hides behind data aggregated for larger territorial units. Moreover, statistics are not available to describe certain qualities of place (e.g. physical environment and services). Therefore, description and explanation of differentiation patterns and factors on the micro level (i.e. within one housing estate) is based on case study research. Among other things, this enables the evaluation of causal (not statistical) dependencies and the identification of actors and mechanisms that influence the organization of urban space.

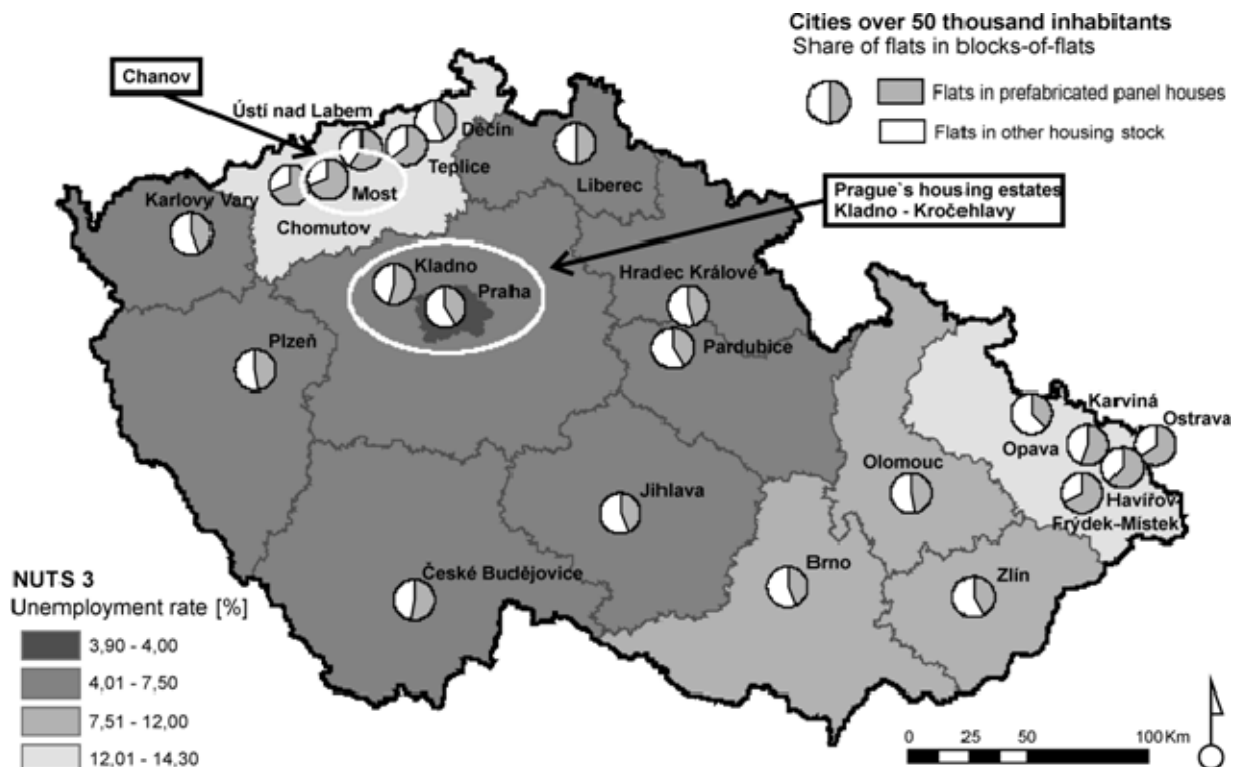
Several case studies, differentiated as to the depth and detail of study, were carried out to illustrate various development scenarios as well as to assess the heterogeneity which exists within housing estates. Two minor case studies (Jižní Město in Prague and Chanov in Most) serve as examples of the development scenarios mentioned above. Here, qualitative methods were applied: study of documents, observation and non-standardized interviews with key actors (local government, non-governmental organizations) and inhabitants of housing estates (only in Chanov). In the case of Kročehlavy in Kladno the research questions were deepened to explore heterogeneity within the housing estate. A detailed case study includes a deep micro-level survey based on a combination of a questionnaire survey, field research and unique statistics provided in large territorial detail. Thanks to cooperation with local government, detailed statistical data, down to the level of houses, were acquired for the measurement of unemployment (anonymous database of unemployed persons provided by local Employment Agency, detailed census data by Czech Statistical Office). The field research in Kročehlavy involved mapping of the physical condition of houses, and the quality of public spaces and services. The questionnaire survey (sample of 200 housing estate residents) was focused on perceptions of the local environment and problems, on satisfaction with the place of residence and on the everyday life of inhabitants. These approaches were complemented by interviews with key actors in neighbourhood development (local government and NGOs).

Differentiation of housing estates in cities in the Czech Republic

During the state socialist era the construction of large-scale housing estates in the Czech Republic was conducted by two main planning efforts; by the urbanization of important regional centres and by rapid development of cities in regions prioritized for socialist industrialization. Although the position of housing estates on the urban residential market was relatively comparable throughout the country, since the beginning of 1990s the development trajectories of housing estates have varied.

The contemporary differentiation of housing estates at a national level is largely influenced by the economic success of regions during the post-socialist transition. Housing estates at risk of social and physical degradation are mostly situated in the economically less successful regions and in cities with a high proportion of dwellings in panel houses (fig. 1). In particular, the regions of Northern Bohemia and Northern Moravia, which were the cores of socialist industry, have experienced structural problems and economic decay during the transformation period. In contrast, a completely different situation can be seen in Prague, which has more than double the GDP per capita compared to the national average, a very low unemployment rate and extremely high housing prices.

Figure 1: Spatial distribution of housing estates and regional differentiation in unemployment rate in the Czech Republic (2001)



Source: Czech Statistical Office, Census 2001.

The growing economic inequalities have resulted in a sharpening of the residential preferences of the Czech population. Compared to the socialist era, the number of cities (regions) perceived as residentially attractive has decreased and consequently the housing demand in these areas has expanded. The average prices of dwellings in panel houses and the unemployment rate well document the variation in contemporary residential attractiveness of cities and regions (tab. 1). There is a visible polarization between the capital of Prague and the rest of the Czech Republic, especially in comparison to extremely low housing prices and high unemployment rates in the regions of socialist industrialization (Most, Ústí nad Labem, Havířov). Housing estates located in structurally disadvantaged regions of Northern Bohemia and Northern Moravia are the most threatened by degradation of social and physical environment.

Table 1: Range of real estate prices and unemployment rates in selected large Czech cities (2008)

	Real estate price*			Unemployment rate
	CZK	EUR	% of Prague's price	
Most	377 100	14 788	15	13,4 %
Ústí nad Labem	558 900	21 918	22	10,4 %
Havířov	740 700	29 047	29	14,3 %
Olomouc	1 611 900	63 212	64	5,1 %
Kladno	1 644 300	64 482	66	6,5 %
Hradec Králové	1 706 400	66 918	68	3,2 %
Prague	2 487 850	97 563	100	2,5 %

Source: IRI, 2007, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2008.

Notes: * Standard flat of 68m² in prefabricated panel buildings.

Most, Ústí nad Labem and Havířov are among the regions and cities with the lowest real estate prices; Olomouc, Kladno and Hradec Králové represent a range of cities with the highest housing prices after the capital of Prague.

The facts described above are important to understand both the recent and the future development of housing estates in various parts of the Czech Republic. Accordingly, the following macro-level factors which have been influencing the development trajectories of housing estates can be distinguished: (1) the economic situation in particular regions, (2) the position of a city in the urban system, (3) the position of a city to important regional centres and (4) the overall attractiveness of a city. Gough *et al.* (2006) argued that while the geography of employment mainly explains the differences between regions, a mixture of employment, housing and transport causes variations on smaller spatial scales. Therefore, locally specific conditions and institutional circumstances of particular cities play a very important role in social and physical differentiation of housing estates at intra-urban level.

Since a considerable part of the urban population still lives in housing estates in Czech cities and there are not enough flats outside these areas to satisfy the growing demand, the degradation of the whole housing estate sector in a particular city is very unlikely. In fact only some of the housing estates or even only certain parts of housing estates face the risk of more remarkable deprivation. Apparently, the most threatened are housing estates with the worst condition of physical environment, low social status of inhabitants, bad location within the city (esp. transport) and unattractive surroundings (e.g. no access to nature).

Not less importantly, the attitude of local governments to privatization, social housing and neighbourhood regeneration plays a significant role in producing residential differentiation at intra-urban level. The negative side of privatization of housing stock lies in the lost of municipal control over the privately-owned housing and thus also over the potential downgrading of some neighbourhoods. Some of the social housing policies enforced by Czech municipalities after

1989, particularly the relocation of tenants with rent arrears to basic social housing, contribute to the concentration of social problems in certain areas. Moreover, institutionally directed developments originating in state socialism are very important for the fortune of housing estates. The mechanism of displacement of poor, elderly and Roma people from houses selected for demolition in the inner cities to newly built housing estates during socialism was described by Maier (1997) or Temelová and Novák (2007). Today, selective, rather than complex approach of local governments to the regeneration of panel housing estates can become an important differentiation factor for housing estates in the Czech Republic. Regeneration of one selected housing estate can thus be at the expense of another one.

Three development scenarios of Czech housing estates

Every city and every housing estate within the city is exposed to the influence of the above described factors. With some generalization, three distinct development scenarios of housing estates can be identified in the Czech Republic: (1) housing estates with positive prospects for future development thanks to the mixed socio-economic composition of the population and the improving physical condition of the residential environment. Most of these basically need no extensive help; (2) housing estates on the crossroad between regeneration and degradation. Their future depends on various factors, especially on the attitude of local governments to privatization, social housing and regeneration; and finally (3) housing estates with a concentration of social problems and little chance of improvement. In the next section the paper presents three different examples of housing estates in the Czech Republic to empirically document the distinct development types mentioned above. A comparison of the main indicators describing social and physical environment in the selected housing estates is introduced in table 2, their geographical location is displayed in figure 1.

Table 2: The main characteristics of selected housing estates

Name	Built in (year)	Average age (2001)	Unemployment rate (2001)	University education (2001)	Quality of physical environment	Quality of services	Price of flat (2008)*
<i>Prague Jižní Město</i>	1970 s – early 1980s	38.7	5.1 %	17.3 %	Good, ongoing regeneration	Sufficient	€110 000
<i>Kladno Kročehlavy</i>	1950s – 1980s	38.8	9.8 %	7.3 %	Fairly good, regeneration in some parts	Sufficient	€80 000
<i>Most Chanov</i>	late 1970s	35.0	35.8 %	3.5 %	Devastated	Poor	----- **

Source: Czech Statistical Office (Census 2001), Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, own internet survey.
Notes: * Standard flat of 68m² in prefabricated panel house. ** No flats available to purchase.

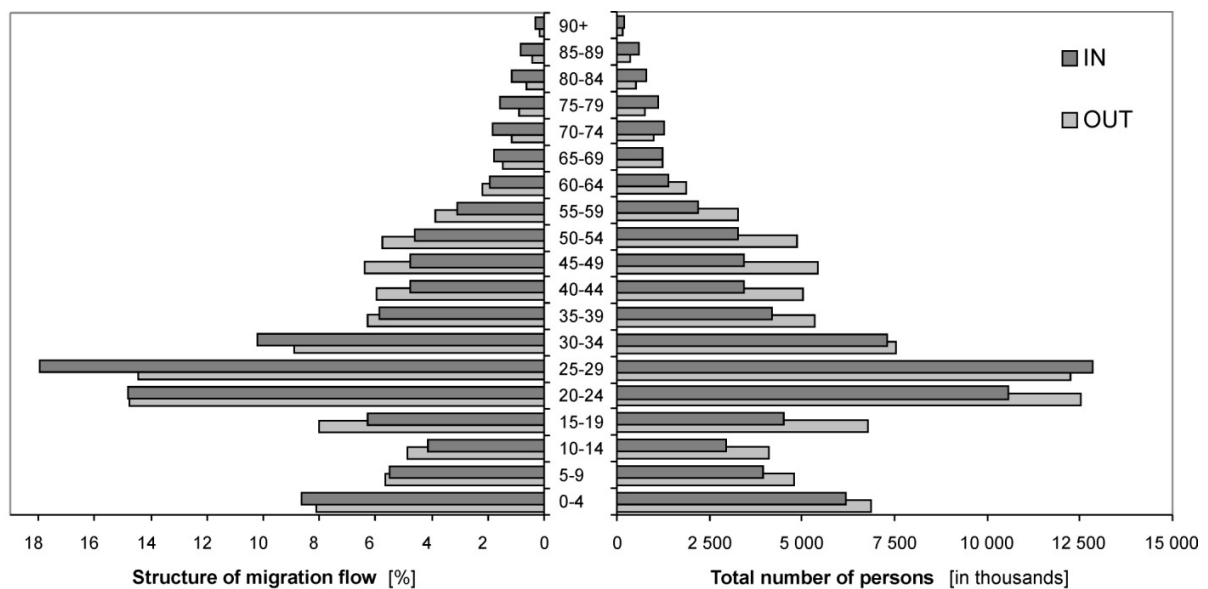
(Almost) Ideal development

The example of Prague can be taken to illustrate the almost ideal development of housing estates in the past decades. There are over 50 housing estates in the capital with more than 200 thousand apartments and about 0.5 million inhabitants (42 % of Prague's population). Unlike in many other Czech cities, housing estates in Prague still retain a fairly stable population and residents are mostly satisfied with their housing situation (Maier, 1997). A large percentage of tenants have bought apartments in the recent privatisation of housing stock. Housing estates in Prague benefit from the general attractiveness of the capital city and especially from the flourishing housing market. High demand for flats in the economically strongest region of the Czech Republic is reinforced by strong population cohorts of the late 1970s and 1980s who are now moving onto the labour market. Therefore housing estates continue to be relatively attractive residential locations. The exceptional position of Prague's housing estates is well documented by the average prices of flats (tab. 1). The relatively high prices of apartments create a significant barrier to social degradation of housing estates in Prague (Ouředníček, 2007a). Moreover, the construction of new apartment houses offering high standard flats in the empty lots inside housing estates further reduces the risk of social degradation.

Analyses of migration trends in a selected sample of Prague housing estates are employed to investigate the population (demographic and social) change during the last decade. The sample of housing estates represents almost 24 % of the population living in the capital and more than 50 % of people living in housing estates in Prague. Although the population of Prague's housing estates is declining, the trend is not as dramatic as was expected in the early 1990s. The changing structure of households plays a significant role in the decrease of total population.

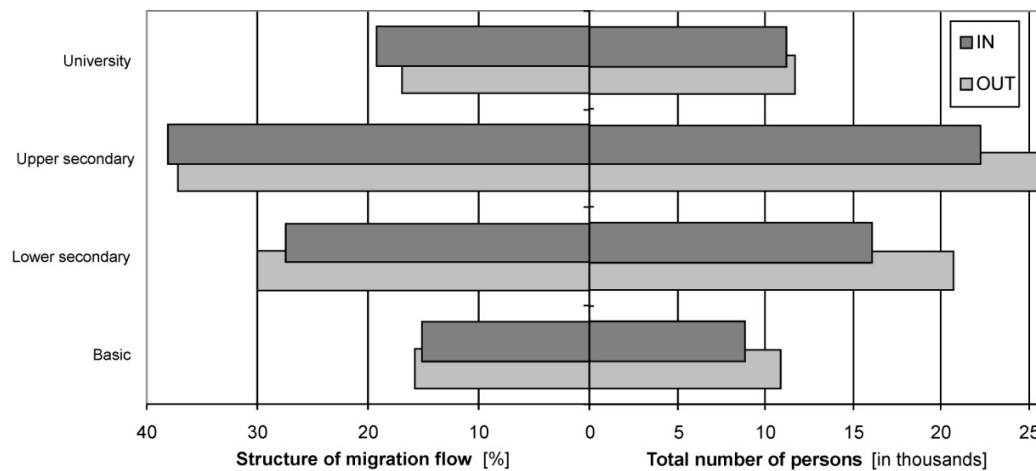
Whereas at the time of construction it was predominantly families with children that lived there, today, with the gradual aging of population in housing estates, the same apartments are inhabited by smaller households. At the same time, migration data demonstrate that a generation exchange has been taking place in Prague's housing estates. While middle-aged residents have been leaving housing estates, young people are replacing them (fig. 2). The analyses of migration further show that younger and better educated people make up a large proportion of the in-coming population compared with the out-going flow (when comparing the structure of migration in- and out- flows) (fig. 3 and 4). The similar social status of incoming and outgoing residents means that a diversified social structure persists. The generation exchange reduces the probability of the pessimistic development scenario, which operates with dramatic ageing and decreasing socio-economic status of housing estates residents. Although there is no clear evidence of social degradation and overall downgrading, there are some differences between particular housing estates in Prague based on factors such as the period of construction, age and socio-economic composition, new housing construction, transport links, property prices, ownership structure, quality of residential environment and surroundings.

Figure 2: Age structure of migrants from/to housing estates in Prague (1995-2003)



Source: Czech Statistical Office, migration statistics 1995-2003.

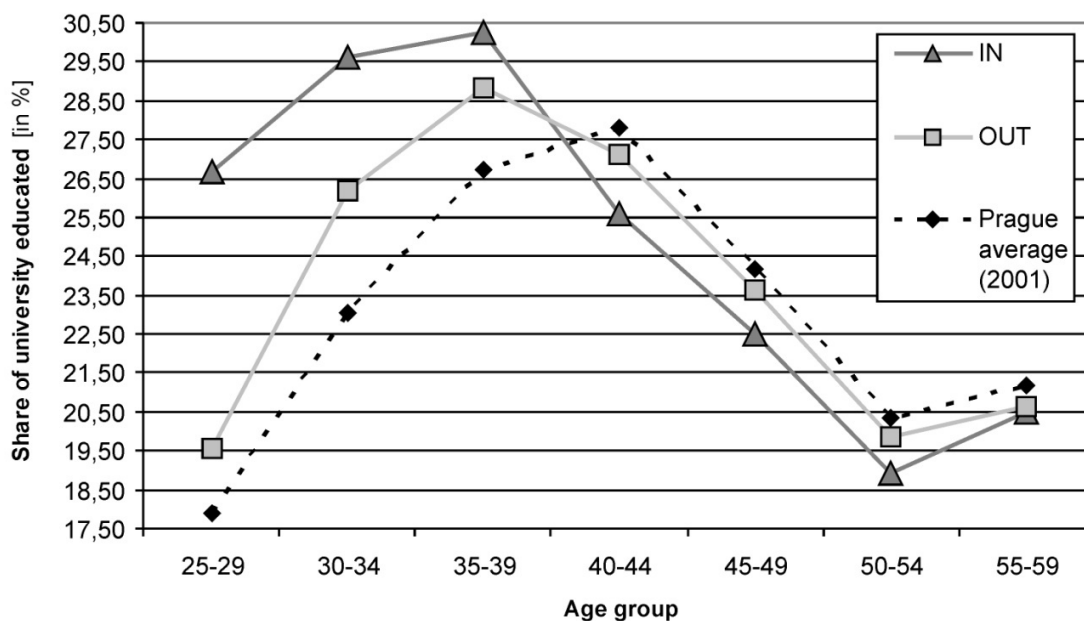
Figure 3: Educational structure of migrants from/to housing estates in Prague (1995-2003)



Source: Czech Statistical Office, migration statistics 1995-2003.

Note: Share of university educated people from population older than 15 years.

Figure 4: Relation between age and education of migrants to and from Prague's housing estates in 1995-2003



Source: Czech Statistical Office, migration statistics 1995-2003.

Note: Share of university educated people in population older than 15 years.

Besides the demographic and social transition housing estates in Prague are also experiencing significant change in the physical environment. The Jižní Město (South Town) is a good example illustrating the recent development of Prague's housing estates. With approximately 80 thousand

inhabitants, Jižní Město is the largest housing estate not only in Prague, but also in the Czech Republic. The housing estate was built with prefabricated technology in two phases during 1970s and the early 1980s. It was seen as a symbol of the socialist era (Maier, 1997). Thanks to the city-general and local-specific features (economic growth of Prague, demand for flats, favourable transport connection by subway, proximity of green spaces) the situation of Jižní Město has distinctively improved since 1989. During the late 1990s and mainly after the year 2000, a process of physical regeneration was begun (fig. 5). Thanks to local government, regeneration took the form of a coordinated initiative leading to upgrading of housing stock and public spaces. At the beginning the city council carried out an architectural study of regeneration. It then gradually financed the renovation of council housing stock and public spaces. However, since the majority of housing stock was privatized, both the activity and the most of financial resources for housing renovation originate from private owners of apartments. It can be assumed that the process of incumbent upgrading is taking place in Jižní Město. As discussed earlier, during the last 10 years Jižní Město has become increasingly attractive especially to young people. From all appearances, we may envisage that the prospects for future development of Jižní Město are promising.

Figure 5: New apartment building and regenerated panel house in Jižní Město



Photos: J. Temelová

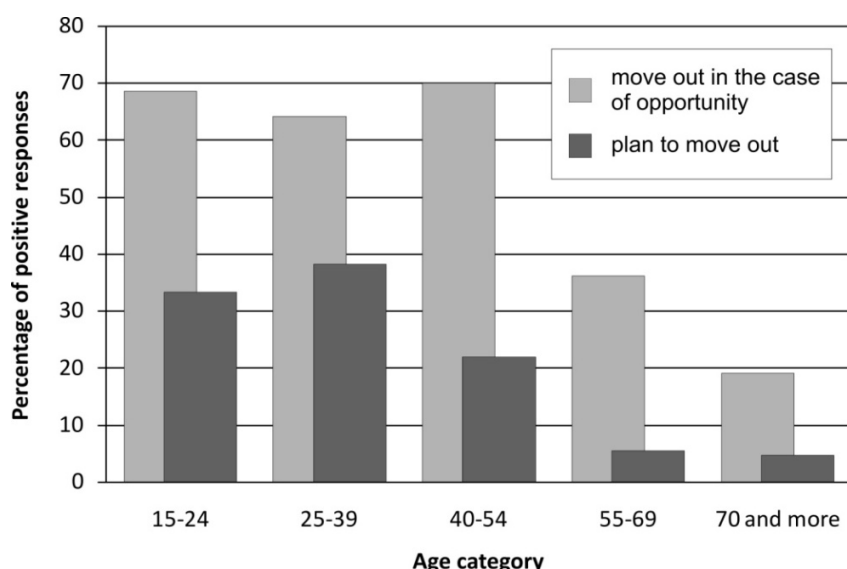
Housing estates on the crossroad

Most of the housing estates in the Czech Republic today stand at a crossroads and their development depends on a range of factors; on external circumstances which are mostly economic, but importantly also on internal conditions of the housing estates, on housing policies and on local government decision making. The Kročehlavy housing estate is situated in Kladno

(70 thousand inhabitants), an industrial city located 20 km north west of Prague. With a population of 27 thousand Kročehlavy is the largest housing estate in the city. The area grew like a snowball from the 1950s, when the first houses were built of bricks, until the end of the 1980s when prefab construction followed. Kročehlavy is a typical example of a working class housing estate built for employees of large industrial plants in the city.

Despite the sharp decline in the local industrial base during the 1990s, Kročehlavy did not turn into a deprived urban zone. The area benefits from a favourable location in the proximity of Prague. Although the population of the housing estate is generally aging, it is gaining younger residents through migration. Good accessibility and cheaper flats compared to the capital make it a relatively attractive residential location especially for younger people from Prague. Even though young and educated newcomers represent an improvement in the age and social structure of the formerly working class housing estate, residential stability of the population is crucial. If Kročehlavy only serves as temporary accommodation for these groups, as a substitute for starter flats for young people from Prague, the positive effect on social and demographic structure will not occur. The results of the questionnaire in the housing estate clearly pointed to a danger of age selective out-migration (fig. 6). The outflow of young people, especially the middle and upper middle classes, can start a long term filtering process resulting in falling social status, physical degradation and image deterioration of the housing estate.

Figure 6: Satisfaction with the place of residence – residential stability in Kročehlavy housing estate



Source: Questionnaire survey, July and August 2007.

Note: Full versions of the questions are: “Would you move out of Kročehlavy if you had the opportunity?” and “Do you plan to move out in the near future?”

The condition for future development in the Kročehlavy housing estate contains many challenges as well as risks. Kročehlavy concentrates 40 % of all dwellings in the city (and 65 % of all prefab flats in Kladno) which makes the chance for degradation of the whole housing estate rather low. Nevertheless small estate locations and house clusters in less attractive parts of the area may become possible sites of social and physical deterioration, which will be explored in the next chapter.

Reinforcing ghettos

State housing policy played an important role in the distribution of population during the socialist period. Although the majority of housing estates were designed as socially mixed, targeted allocation of population to certain areas, particularly to industrialized regions in northern Bohemia and northern Moravia is even today evident in the higher concentration of some social and ethnic groups (working class, Roma people) in certain housing estates. The contemporary transformation processes usually reinforce the segregation pattern created under state socialism.

The Roma ghetto of Chanov, located at the edge of the city of Most in northern Bohemia, represents an extreme and exceptional case of politically imposed segregation in the Czech context. The Chanov housing estate was constructed on the city periphery as a result of a political decision by the socialist regime in the second half of the 1970s. The aim was to accommodate the problematic Roma population from tenement houses in the old town of Most, which were demolished because of coal-mining. The Czech and better-off Roma families gradually moved out from Chanov and only the most deprived households remained in the vacant dwellings. During the transformation period problems have even deepened as the whole reindustrializing city faces economic failure. The area became a synonym for physical and social degradation. The housing stock is in a catastrophic state due to constant devastation by inhabitants (fig. 7). The vast majority of people are poorly educated, unemployed and in debt. Drug addiction and early pregnancy are common among Chanov teenagers. Stigmatization by outsiders, social and spatial exclusion together with passivity and apathy on the part of the local population make integration into the labour market, upward social mobility or escape from the ghetto extremely difficult.

The city recently launched several strategies and projects to assist socially excluded people in Chanov, but other moves by local government contributed to conservation of the housing estate as a segregated and stigmatized area. In the 1990s the city did not manage to privatize flats in Chanov as the poor and indebted tenants were not able to buy. Dwellings in Chanov, which are at the dead end of the housing market, represent the vast majority of municipal housing in Most. Residual council housing bound to a certain location creates a stigmatized neighbourhood where only those with little choice are prepared to live. This mechanism behind social deprivation has also been described in many West European housing estates (Hall, 1997, Taylor, 1998, Holt-Jensen, 2000). Moreover, the city established dormitories for people with rent arrears next to the Chanov housing estate in the 1990s. Relocation of people who did not pay their rent to basic social housing became a widespread instrument of municipal housing policy in the Czech Republic. At the same time it became an unwanted mechanism of residential segregation and neighbourhood downgrading. The case of Chanov shows how political relocation of the population rooted in state socialism can be reinforced by the contemporary economic situation and local housing policy and alerts us against creation of new extremes similar to Chanov.

Figure 7: Residential environment in the ghetto-like Chanov housing estate



Photos: J. Temelová, J. Novák

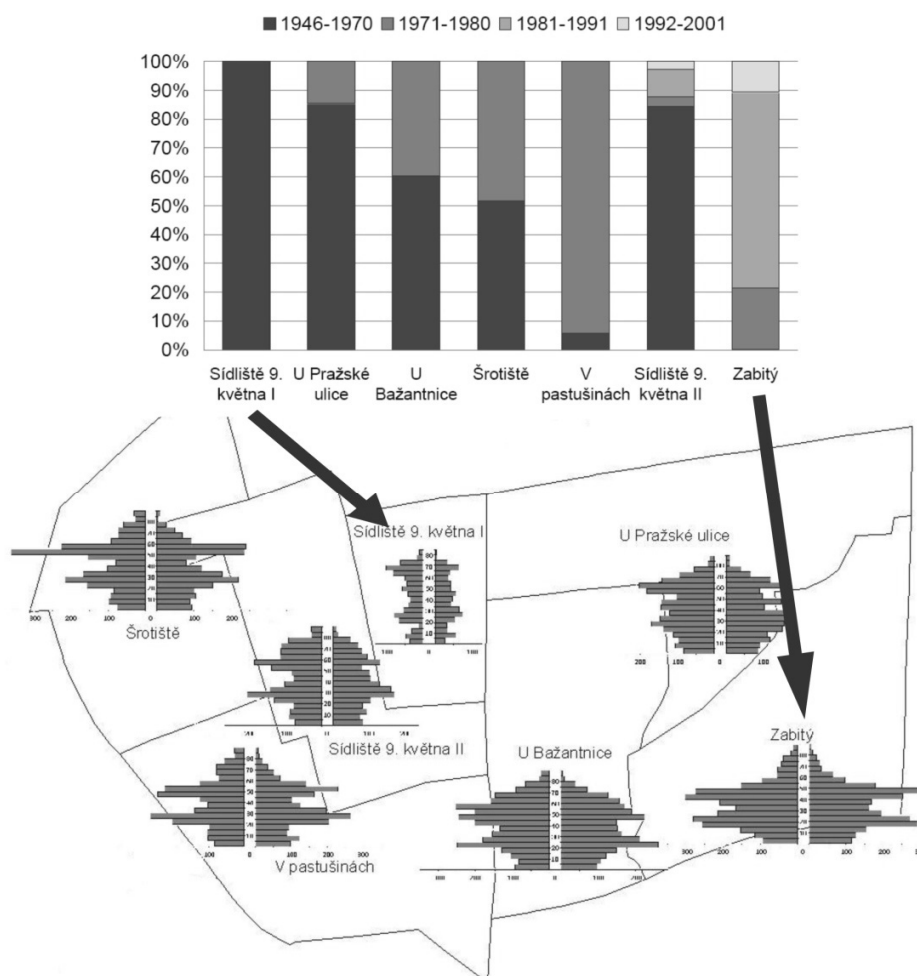
Exploring heterogeneity within a housing estate

The Kročehlavy housing estate in Kladno serves to demonstrate micro scale differentiation. The example of Kročehlavy is interesting to consider since the future development of this housing estate balances between the good and the bad scenarios. The socio-spatial analysis at the

micro level is of particular importance in the Czech context since segregation processes take place mainly at a very small scale in houses or blocks of houses. It is reasonable to suggest that degradation in the form of housing clusters or small estate locations rather than deprivation of the whole area are more likely in the case of Czech housing estates.

The Kročehlavy housing estate shows a strong inner heterogeneity in the demographic, social and physical characteristics of the population. The age structure in basic settlement units mirrors various periods of housing construction and the two-generation character of housing estate. While the oldest parts of the housing estate are aging, recently constructed units show a much younger demographic structure (fig. 8).

Figure 8: Period of housing construction and age structure of population in basic settlement units, Kročehlavy housing estate in 2001



Source: Czech Statistical Office, Census 2001.

Figure 9: Unemployment rate by basic settlement units and by houses, Kročehlavy housing estate in 2007



Source: Employment Agency in Kladno, Czech Statistical Office, Census 2001

The existing social heterogeneity within the housing estate is at best illustrated by looking at differentiation in the unemployment rate. While the average rate for the housing estate reaches 7.3 %, it varies between 4.7 % and 8 % in basic settlement units (fig. 9). The level of houses shows a more detailed pattern of uneven spatial distribution of unemployed people in Kročehlavy (fig. 9). The maps illustrate that several pockets of poverty are emerging in the southern part of housing estate. These locations also show a higher incidence of social pathology, a higher concentration of people on housing benefits and the level of education of the population is lower (Temelová *et al.*, 2007). There is a danger that such seeds of social degradation may develop into larger areas of segregation in the future.

The characteristics of the physical environment basically support the pattern of social differentiation in Kročehlavy. Housing from the 1970s and 1980s in the southern part of the neighbourhood, where roads with heavy traffic circle the area, represents the worst residential environment measured by the physical condition of houses, amount of green areas and quality of public spaces. Moreover the residents questioned in the survey perceive the physical environment in these areas as the worst (Temelová *et al.*, 2007). Analyses of the real estate market also proved that the flats located here are cheaper and more difficult to sell. Differences in the outdoor environments of the housing estate are well illustrated in the photos (fig. 10); while private and public spaces in the worst parts are deteriorating, some locations within the neighbourhood offer renovated housing and cultivated outdoor spaces.

Diverse factors explain the inner variability in the Kročehlavy housing estate. Many explanations are drawn from internal conditions of the housing estate and local variations in the period of construction, previous and current ownership structures, access to nature, position in relation to main roads, transport links and other features of particular sites. Under socialism tenement structure was tightly related to housing ownership in different parts of the housing estate (e.g. if the house belonged to a state factory, most of the tenants were factory workers). This is even today reflected in the social structure of particular blocks. Variations in physical planning during the socialist era are mirrored in housing and neighbourhood design of estate segments built in different periods. While the parts of housing estate constructed during the first two post-war decades are relatively rationally organized combining housing, public spaces and services, later the centrally planned housing system ran out of both resources and ideals and thus poor architectural design, bad urbanism and a lack of facilities characterize the building production of the 1970s and 1980s. Physical environment together with social features of particular locations

influence the image of place, which is further reproduced among potential users and residents of the area.

Figure 10: Contrasting condition of houses and public spaces in the Kročehlavy housing estate



Photos: J. Novák, M. Ouředníček, J. Temelová

Many causes of inner variation within housing estates are embedded at the city level. The case of Kročehlavy demonstrates again how public sector allocation policies lead to a concentration of disadvantaged citizens to a cluster of streets in the eastern part of the housing estate. Meta complex, which according to the analyses is the most deprived part of the estate, was built in the 1980s as a result of a government decision to gather disabled people from throughout the Czech Republic into several housing blocks in Kročehlavy. Consequently, disabled people occupy the majority of the 255 municipal dwellings concentrated in a long prefabricated block. Apparently the area is noted for the negative characteristics associated with segregated areas; stigmatization, a high unemployment rate, a low level of education, physical deterioration and social pathology (Temelová *et al.*, 2007). Although in recent years the city has made attempts to allocate non-disabled (but still socially deprived) people to Meta complex, the housing is unattractive due to its very poor physical condition, unsatisfactory outdoor spaces and the

perceived stigmatization. Moreover, local government does not have many choices for the accommodation of disabled people elsewhere in the city as the only appropriate flats are located in Meta and few new ones have been built. It is obvious that regeneration is required to improve the quality of life in and around Meta and to prevent the area from further degradation. A lot is in hands of local government and its approach to physical regeneration and the housing allocation of socially needed and disadvantaged households.

Conclusion and discussion of future development

Since 1989 the Czech Republic has experienced deep social changes on the path from socialism to democracy and the free market. Housing estates have naturally not escaped aside these changes. Since a large number of people live in housing estates in post-socialist cities, the investigation of their contemporary development trajectories and particularly of the processes that transform their socio-demographic composition and residential environment is a topic of high importance in CEE urban studies. Housing estates represent specifically socialist environments. Their analyses in contemporary CEE cities contributes to better understanding of urban post-socialist transformation in general, and of risk processes leading to social degradation, demographic ageing and physical downgrading of housing estates in particular.

A comprehensive analysis of housing estates from different geographical scales enabled the description and the explanation of causal relationships in urban environment and thus enriched the general knowledge on socio-spatial development in post-socialist cities. In general the paper demonstrated that housing estates in the Czech Republic are not one homogenous group. Some of them are at real risk of social exclusion and physical degradation, while others are on the way to becoming a stable part of the residential mosaic of post-socialist cities. In the inter-urban comparison the position of housing estates is mainly affected by the interplay of (1) historical legacies of centrally planned housing construction, which resulted in a high concentration of housing estates in regions of socialistic industrialization and of (2) the economic success of these regions and cities during post-socialist transformation. Evaluating the recent development and future prospects the research introduced three development scenarios of housing estates in the Czech Republic. The most extreme scenario is demonstrated in the Chanov housing estate, where the failures of both the former socialist and the post-socialist public authorities has led to local degradation and the creation of spatial poverty trap. In contrast, the scenario represented by Prague's housing estates explains how socialist housing estates are being regenerated and

transformed into stable and acceptable residential neighbourhoods. The risk of physical decay has been partly overcome by regeneration initiatives of flat owners and local government, demographic aging has been balanced by in-migration of young people to the housing estates and the socially mixed structure of the incoming population prevents social degradation. As the case study of Kročehlavy showed, the direction of future development is not yet set in many housing estates. While some housing clusters within the estate have assumed a positive regeneration trajectory, others remain locked in a status-quo with signs of emerging poverty traps. Generally speaking, the micro geographical approach illustrated that in Czech cities socio-spatial poverty traps are mainly generated at the level of particular houses or block of houses. This finding is especially notable from the perspective of urban policy, since the seeds of physical and social degradation may escalate to larger areas and lead to decline of the whole neighbourhood.

With reference to local policy planning, the significant differentiations identified on several geographical levels suggest that diverse approaches are needed for the regeneration of particular housing estates. A single general policy imposed by state institutions is unlikely to bring desirable results since it does not respond to the specific needs of individual housing estates. Therefore, the crucial role lies at the local level in the hands of local governments (municipalities).

Footnotes

1 - A standard flat is defined as a three-room flat with an area of 68 square metres, which is a common size in the majority of Czech housing estates.

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