

Viktória Szirmai

“Artificial Towns”

in the 21st Century

Social Polarisation

in the New Town Regions of East-Central Europe

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SOCIAL POLARISATION IN THE NEW TOWN REGIONS
OF EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

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The Main Social Polarisation Features of the East-Central European New Town Regions

Viktória Szirmai

Introduction

The book titled “*Artificial Towns*” in the 21st Century; *Social Polarisation in the New Town Regions of East-Central Europe* undertook the task of presenting the East-Central European new towns and in this context, mainly the Hungarian, but also the Polish and Slovak social polarisation mechanisms of the new towns and their regions, the contemporary typical social structural interrelationships and their determinations. Furthermore, the book attempts to give an answer to the overall question whether a new type of urban development model has been created during the development of “socialist” new towns that up to now has preserved the historical features typical of new towns i.e. whether it has maintained its own characteristic features stemming from its past along with the differences in comparison with other town types.

These towns all have been created by governmental decisions from public resources, in the pursuit of several aspirations. The forced development of economy – especially of heavy industry – was a priority, as well as the establishment of their necessary industrial bases. The political demand of a full reckoning with the

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(bourgeois) past, the building of new, that is socialist and at the same time workers' towns without any social inequalities, which were different from any earlier towns, were if not the objectives, but at least very strong promises of the ideologies represented by central party states.

Therefore, the central element of the researches underlying the book was the exploration of social structural features, social polarisation and their spatial sections. Although it is clear today that these ideologies could not guarantee the full realisation of the promises concerning the elimination of social inequalities (as already mentioned, not least because their realisation would have required or would require other social structural intervention tools in addition to urban architectural instruments as well). Therefore, this book does not seek to examine these promises either. However, it seeks to examine what these towns are like today? Have they preserved their historically established features, their urban identity, the main features of their social structure and their spatial social positioning? What changes have occurred in these characteristics: in urbanistic and urban structural features, in the social, spatial location? What is characteristic of their today's social structure, have they preserved their so-called workers' town nature, young character? How are they located in the city-region areas? Are there any signs of social separation, or segregation in them?

The answers to these questions may serve as clues to answering the two comprehensive questions raised in the introductory part of this book. One question was whether as a result of new town developments a special, new town type has been created, different from any others existing town types, in Eastern and Central Europe, including Hungary? The other question was whether contemporary new town societies have realised any of the historically formulated promises, in other words: how to evaluate the social conditions characteristic of today's new town regions; only as unfulfilled promises or rather as a viable social milieu for their current inhabitants? For the answers it was necessary to analyse the historical and contemporary characteristics of "socialist" new towns, their historical determinations stemming from the past but still valid today, and the transformation processes characteristic today. On the other hand, the similarities and differences between the new town regions and other types of town regions had to be also examined.

Path dependency and the contemporary changes

Historical effects

The effects of modern architectural doctrines influencing the formation of Western European new towns can up to the present day be detected both in the relations and the social polarisation characteristics of the studied Eastern and Central European new towns and their regions. Evolving from these principles mostly those commonly specified urban structural prints, architectural characteristic features can be identified that separate them from the relevant characteristics of other town types developed in traditional manner. While obviously, modern architectural features can be found in every city, but to a lesser extent, and in far more mixed forms, as the variety of past and modern architectural styles.

In each studied country the planning of the first phases that determined the development of new towns attempted to control local social life, including the prevention of spatial social segregation. Its realisation was supported by a number of planning dogmas: among them (also) mainly for the purpose of creating “workers’ towns”, the formation of neighbourhood units of a homogeneous architectural character as well as the principles of order, discipline, purpose fulness, homogenously composed and connected cities and the principle of the unity of the factory and the city. For a long time these principles of planning appeared to be successful because the lack of segregation was ensured not only by undifferentiated architectural residential conditions, but also by the undifferentiated structural conditions of residential features.

The later developmental periods, have overwritten these social dogmas and their spatial social panels. The new towns’ standard, usually two-room flats, the housing estates of essentially one-dimensional architectural image (which served more for labour force reproduction and less for leisure activities) only in the first periods fulfilled the needs of the homogeneous (mainly unskilled) social status population. The afterwards changing social structure required a different residential environment which the city administration was mostly unable to provide either because of the continuous reduction of local funds or the geographical limitations of urban development, or the contemporary impacts of short-term planning mechanisms, ignoring future needs and possibilities.

Although the state construction industry also evolved in the meantime, the new towns served quasi as touchstones of the newer versions of modernising construction technologies. From the 1970s onwards next to some of the standard (usually four-) storey buildings built in the previous periods higher (ten storey-) buildings were built with more diversified but still standard (two- or three-bedroom) flats. But the real change was brought by the privatisation of real estate and housing market and the evolution of the middle-class: from 1980 onwards, but especially in the 1990s in almost all the new towns modern (typical of the particular era) residential quarters were built which represented the individual needs, the expectations and the market power of the residents of different social positions.

The local manifestations of the communist regime's mechanisms, the key positions prevailing at the first stages of the development of new towns and then the disadvantaged positions of the later periods all draw powerful dividing lines between the new towns and the other types of towns. In the yet flourishing stages of communist regimes the conditions of all the socialist new towns were strongly determined by the characteristic features of the centralised allocation of development resources based on re-distributive society and regional management, and their many years of exceptionally favourable situation in that system. One of its very important manifestations was that the state parties almost "countlessly" provided housing and infrastructure development funds for "workers'" towns. In the first periods of new town developments these were the only places where people got brand new flats, (and also a job). This explains why large scale migrations started especially from the rural (agricultural) settlements held in atrophy by the central powers of the affected countries to new towns. In all cases this generated a rapid population growth in the new settlements.

In the 1990s (and particularly after 2010), their population significantly decreased; due to the economic crises associated with the change of regime, the labour layoffs following the large-scale financial difficulties of big plants and as an attempt to escape from unemployment many people returned to their home settlements in this period but others migrated mainly to economically advanced larger cities able to offer job opportunities, especially to their neighbouring settlements but more recently (as a result of the

European Union's employment opportunities) abroad as well. The present outmigration of the population, the declining population is one of the serious (even more serious compared to other towns) problems of post-socialist new towns.

Workers' cities

According to the ideological aims of socialist urbanisation the Eastern and Central European new towns were built for the workers. However, the Hungarian researches of the 1970s and 1980s revealed that the reality is more differentiated: the socialist new towns of that period served the interests of the elite; the (usually highly educated) technical managers of large companies, local council leaders (the predecessors of today's local governments), skilled workers with medium-level qualifications (mainly men) and of mid-level foremen (*Szirmai, 1988*). These researches highlighted the dividedness of the social structures of Hungarian new towns, the favourable living and working conditions, the higher income of the elite groups but also the disadvantaged income conditions and life quality of the unskilled, mostly uneducated female labour force but also of the free intellectual workers and graduates.

The socialist new town development strategies emphasised not only the workers' character of new settlements, but also highlighted their higher social importance and future building roles compared to other settlements. It gave a difficult task for local societies whose members due to the absence of job opportunities were forced to move away from their original (mostly rural) place of residence and yet had not been integrated into the new homes for a long time and because of the lack of coherent urban cultures, local rules and values historically existing in the traditional town types, it was even impossible for them to integrate.

Over the years, the partially, but still coming ideological and local social integration later had negative effects: partly during the first "dethronements" in the early 1980s, the radical reduction of central funds following the crises of communism, partly in the transition periods of the 1990s: when new towns were demoted on all levels of the society. The population of the new towns did not understand and still does not understand what "sin" they have committed that they had to feel almost ashamed of the benefits of their past, and especially why they need to live worse now.

Contemporary social structures

The facts of the representative research for 11 new town regions conducted in 2015 revealed that the historical social structural features are still existent: based on the distribution of the population by occupational categories Hungarian new towns can still be called workers' towns: among the new towns' population the number of blue-collar employees is the highest, even higher than their proportion in Hungarian large urban metropolitan areas. The ratio of white-collar workers, high-skilled workers over the years have considerably increased, but it does not reach the corresponding rates for Hungarian large urban metropolitan societies. The Polish and Slovak analyses highlight similar facts.

However, along with this new trends also prevail: in the context of the regime change the former social structural features of the new towns have transformed due to the privatisation of large companies, to the diversification of the economy, to the formation of new economic roles along with the former heavy industrial functions, and to the unravelling of private property market and local town planning and development. New social groups have appeared in the local structures: such as new foreign owners and managers, foreign and national property developers, self-employed entrepreneurs. This change was accompanied by the change of the local elite; the newly emerged social groups pushed the previously powerful national corporate elite members and even local government (council) leaders into the background. The gap in income and quality of life has increased, especially between foreign and national owners, foreign and national managers, as well as between semi-skilled, skilled and unskilled workers.

The aspects of civil local communities (including advocacy and active participation in local social life) were still excluded from local decision-making mechanisms. This trend was the same as what could be experienced for many years in different researches, including the ones for the Hungarian metropolitan areas as well. According to Hungarian new town societies, in the various local and municipal decisions primarily the interests of elite groups (in the following sequence: local political leaders, big entrepreneurs, major groups of intellectuals, foreign investors) are taken into account, the aspects of the general public and of individual interests get a lower priority.

The present results of the representative research for the Hungarian 11 new town regions clearly demonstrate the new towns' population's less favourable than the average living conditions (but also in comparison to the major Hungarian cities): the average level of unemployment is higher than the national average, half of the sample examined has already been unemployed at some time. The proportion of those who (though to varying degrees) live under poor financial circumstances is high, only nearly half of the respondents stated that they comfortably get by on their income, nearly the other half live in poverty or live month to month, or can hardly make ends meet from their monthly income. Only five percent of families live without worries. The proportion of people with some kind of loan is also high. A comparison of large urban areas reveals that in the new towns the proportion of households with the lowest income is almost exactly the double of those in big cities and their surroundings (*Ferencz, 2015*).

Socio-spatial polarisation trends

According to the comparison of the results of the representative research for the 11 Hungarian new town regions with the results of the research of Hungarian large urban metropolitan areas conducted in 2005 and 2014, the current spatial structure of the new towns' society with a certain delay follows (in the long term probably it will follow in an even clearer form) the already experienced social spatial distributions of Hungarian metropolitan societies, and on this basis the European trend as well.

This finding is verified by the following facts: 1) The distributions of the spatial social structures of new town regions measured in 2015 show the manifestation of some trends revealed in Hungarian metropolitan areas in 2005 in the new towns: 2) certain trends of changes in the Hungarian metropolitan areas recorded between 2005 and 2014 have emerged among the characteristic features of the new town regions by 2015 as well.

The representative sociological survey on nine large urban regions of Hungary conducted in 2005 revealed a strong spatial social hierarchy in the inner structure of the city and in the relationship between the city and its urban periphery (*Szirmai, 2009*). According to this, going outward from the city centre towards the urban periphery the presence of high social status (highly educat-

ed and skilled workers) groups decreased while the concentration of lower social status (low-skilled, unskilled workers) groups increased. This gradual hierarchical decrease, however, has been broken by advanced and less advanced¹ suburban zones; in the advanced suburban zones the concentration of higher social status groups was higher than the sample average, while it was lower in less advanced suburban zones.

In 2014 the social hierarchy of metropolitan areas began to dissolve, the social structure of individual districts became more balanced: the highest social status (graduates and the highest wage earners) occupied more and more space in inner city quarters, but their ratio has also increased in the outer districts; the difference in the proportion of higher social status population between the advanced and less advanced suburban zones has disappeared. Thus, the higher social status groups have pushed the lower social status groups out of inner city spaces, and at the same time they have invaded the less advanced suburban zones as well (*for more details see: Szirmai–Ferencz, 2015; Csizmady–Ferencz, 2016*).

The representative sociological survey on Hungarian new town regions conducted in 2015 indicates the contemporary manifestation of the metropolitan trends, revealed in the year 2005, in the context of two correlations. One of them is noticeable in the context of cities and their surroundings. According to this, dichotomies between inner city quarters and suburban zones can be observed between new town centres and their urban peripheries: the population of developed suburban zones has a better social structure than less advanced urban peripheries. The other aspect is manifested in the inner parts of cities, by the hierarchical location of the educated, more qualified social groups. According to the trends seen in large urban areas, going outward from the city centre towards the urban periphery the presence of high social status (highly educated and skilled workers) groups hierarchically decreased while the concentration of lower social status (low-skilled, unskilled workers) groups increased but only in the case of inner city parts and transition zones. The social structure of the

¹ The choice of developed and underdeveloped suburban settlements was made on the basis of the ranking number method by aggregating some basic statistical indicators (housing, education, income, tax payment, unemployment etc.) then thematising them according to development level.

suburban zones of new towns brings to mind one of the latest trends measured in 2014: the moving of higher social status (educated, skilled workers, managers) further away from the city centre, as well as the exclusion of lower social status groups from the city centre and from the transition zones, especially into the transition zones and underdeveloped urban neighbourhoods.

Behind the changes global urbanisation, partly the acceleration of suburbanisation, partly a subtle, but already unfolding gentrification can be found. In the 1990s in new towns suburbanisation also accelerated thanks to the needs of the middle-class to move out of the town, and to their more dynamic space occupation in the smaller neighbouring settlements attractive for them. As a result of increasing housing and real estate prices in the inner cities and as a result of the increase in the number of impoverished residents the number of people moving out of downtown parts has risen. Naturally, the target areas of the two types of social groups do not match: the members of higher social status, better-income groups increasingly sought to move into more developed suburban areas, while the lower social status, low income groups chose less developed suburban settlements as their destination.

The latest research data show that the intentions to move today are not really typical, only a few percent of the respondents want to and some who would like to, but cannot move out. And obviously the social problems of the involved play a role, poverty, or unemployment. But it is also due to the fact that the inner quarters of new towns in the last few years were restored and renovated. This financial support system of the European Union played a significant role in this: approximately 90% of the costs of urban regeneration were financed by the EU, so the necessity of involving local resources was insignificant. The towns' historical parts were declared protected for the preservation of the socialist realist architectural style and heritage. All this served for the trends of further closing up to other types of towns.

Social polarisation among the post-socialist new towns

Impacts of the transition period

The crisis and fall of socialist regimes, the regime changes emerging in 1989-1990, the evolution of market economy, the privatisation of the state owned land, real estate and housing properties, the retreat of state territorial and municipal planning, the formation of their local variant, the emergence of market actors (real estate developers, investors) the impact of globalisation and European integration processes created a completely new situation for the municipalities of the surveyed countries, including new towns. They (as the previous chapters described) responded to these trends in different ways: some of them were successful and others were far less prepared for the changes, for the economic and social innovations.

The success or failure of the transition depended on the historically conditioned situation as well; on the conditions in which the change of regime, the processes shaping the market economy and the social system emerged. Compared to other town types it can generally be concluded that for these new towns the transition was a more difficult process. This is partly due to the fact that the socialist urban development, the characteristic features of the redistributive distribution mechanisms prevailed with a greater than the average strength, and partly to the still existing dependencies on the state (most recently on the European Union), the local government's and the local society's past (and even present) hopes associated with this in public thinking when other settlements were already seeking the way for their own renewal. The global economic impacts also differentially affected these areas (as well), the privatisations of large state firms proved unsuccessful in case of several new towns, foreign and national investors showed little interest in the new town regions.

The kind of corporate culture which was rather common knowledge among old town residents and which was present even during the communist regime, often only implicitly in the background, preserved in small family businesses was less known for the citizens of new towns. The citizens of traditional towns remembered more the life styles of relative autonomy, independence

from the state, and under which they knew better how to survive the tight state dependencies and how to create individual freedom in the midst of the dependency on the state. The employees of large state-owned enterprises did not really have the chance to develop such skills. Among other things, because the citizens of new towns, or their parents many years before left behind their old small-town, rural environment where they were born or where they were growing up and accepted not only the convenience of new town life, its superiority (in the contemporary sense), but also the very limited possibilities of their control over their own life. And with this they almost refused or ignored all the old, for example entrepreneurial models, which could have been used (in favourable conditions) under the regime change.

Polarisation features

Today's new towns and their regions are by no means a homogeneous milieu. The formerly winning settlements under the social, economic and political conditions and advocacy mechanisms of the socialist system turned to be losers during the transition but also the losers themselves have become differentiated. The studies presenting the Polish and Slovak towns clearly reveal the differences in internal polarisation, the differences between advanced, dynamic, and between stagnant or already crisis regions (*Węclawowicz-Hajda, 2016; Gajdoš-Moravanská, 2016*). The Hungarian data show similar internal structural differences, including a variety of statistical analyses (*Csizmady, 2016; Rechnitzer-Berkes-Páthy, 2016*) but the results of individual case studies as well (*Baranyai, 2016; Berki, 2016; Halász, 2016; Schuchmann, 2016*).

Based on the analyses, three different groups of new towns and new town regions have been formulated: one group includes developed new towns: Százhalombatta, Paks, and Tiszaújváros, but Tatabánya also belongs here. But it may include the surveyed Polish new town of Tychy and the Slovak new town of Nová Dubnica as well. These are the regions that could easily adapt to the requirements of market society due to various reasons: the crisis was not as deep as elsewhere, they had favourable local endowments, for example, economic functions important for the state, and the consequent government subsidies, had good geographical location and transport positions, or the local presence of foreign

direct investment. The characteristics of the local societies, such as the young educated skilled labour force also helped them. As a result of this, their unemployment rate is below average and their net migration is positive.

The second statistical group contains the stagnant towns. Ajka, Dunaújváros, Oroszlány, Várpalota may be listed here. These are the urban areas that were basically able to handle the crisis, which more or less managed to maintain their population and where the local residents' educational attainment is relatively favourable. The directions of further steps and resources, however, are uncertain, mainly due to their strong dependence on global economy.

The third group includes the real losers of the regime change: Kazincbarcika, Komló, Ózd are the members of it. These are the regions which completely lost their particularly advantageous positions gained during the state socialist regime, especially in the 1950s and 1960s and got into a very difficult situation during the transition. Their former urban economies gradually eroded, their operating state companies degraded, shut down, or having been transformed into small firms are vegetating now. Foreign and domestic direct investments avoid these areas, the young marketable population living there goes away as there are few chances to break out locally, including business opportunities; for this reason these towns will gradually lose their population. In these (so-called) local societies of new town crisis regions, the ratio of people without primary school education is high and the proportion of people with certificate of secondary education and especially university diploma is low. Compared to the national average unemployment is high, especially among the uneducated and younger age groups. Thus, the renewal of these regions are substantially hindered by the local social features.

A “new” urban development model or merely an unfulfilled promise?

Based on the achieved results it must be declared that there are no clear answers to the question asked in the introductory part of the book. Since certain facts and processes suggest that a specific, new town development model has been born, which is different from the traditional model of town development. Namely along

the sections of historical heritage and the regime change, on the basis of social structuring still bearing the marks of the past but also the consequences of the current processes, showing features different from other urban types. Other factors, however, suggest that in fact we are not witnessing the organisation of a new quality, historical effects are insignificant and as a result of today's determinative social and economic processes similarities with other types of towns are more typical and differences are less typical. To give a clear answer is also complicated by the fact that the same processes that cause the similarities also ensure the preservation of differences. This can be seen in the case of urbanistic features, in the characteristic features of social structure and in the changes, or in the preservation of the original conditions of social, spatial location.

To find the best possible answers the three main issues, that is the urbanistic features, the specifics of social structure and the characteristic features of the social, spatial location and in their context the original conditions characteristic of the time of their formation, and the trends of change occurred over the years are put on imaginary scales of 0-10 points. Of course the scales indicate the processes schematically, without providing a deeper content. Starting from 0 indicating the main endowments of the past and moving towards 10 on the scale indicates the signs of the gradual departure from the past. The endpoints of the scales mark the current features.

The first scale represents the new towns' urban, architectural conditions and their transformations, the second scale represents changes in social structures, and the third one the past and present characteristics of spatial social structure. The number of scales can be increased if needed, but the book's thematic aims justify the examination of mainly these three dimensions, and an additional factor, namely the new towns' position of in the regime change of 1990, the manifestation of social, economic, and political transitions in new towns, their successful or even unsuccessful adaptation to market conditions, to global conditions. This factor is different from the previous ones, since it is only about the present days; it places today's conditions on the scale.

1) On the starting points of the scale presenting urban sections expressing the transition, the historical determinations of the analysed new towns we find the rather homogeneous features, including the mostly protected inner city zones of the socialist realist architecture (*Kissfazakas, 2016*), as well as the buildings of the original settlements, of the old rural, small-town environment. At the points of later periods the picture is more varied, as besides the historical parts, the often boring, one-dimensional homogeneous (prefabricated technology based) housing estates having been built from state funds, as well as the slowly growing suburbs are present. At the end of the scale the already heterogeneous creations of earlier periods, but mainly the market formatted, recently built, and uniquely faced districts can be found. However, this mixed image provides less than what today's similar-sized cities offer, and most of all does not come up to what larger cities show.

2) At the starting point of the scale representing the social structure of towns we can find homogeneous new town communities made up of mostly unskilled, young working families, which is typical for the first phase of urban development processes; the subsequent points of the scale represent constantly changing now more differentiated social structures: the more qualified, better educated new local societies still with mostly young families and a high proportion of workers but they are already the social groups of market economy.

3) The starting point of the scale representing the spatial social structure represents the relatively homogeneous social structure, subdued segregation, and the lack of suburbanisation. At the subsequent points more segregated social units, the dichotomous contradictions between the town and its surroundings and the increasing spatial and social polarisation appear.

4) On the scale representing the fourth additional factor, the investigated Eastern and Central European, namely the Hungarian, Polish and Slovak new towns would be also given different rankings: because of the differences of the historical backgrounds, of the special features of the Eastern European systems by countries, but also because of the differentiation of the European integration and global impacts. From the aspects of the success positions achieved during the regime change the investigated Polish and Slovak towns receive better ranking, but also the group of

Hungarian new towns found as more advanced as a result of a variety of different types of analyses. Similarly to this, the towns of the two other groups may get worse rankings.

Based on the thematic differentiations of the new towns' placement on the imaginary scale, the contemporary relevancies of the characteristic features of new towns can be defined: the features at the starting point of the scale would represent the present day manifestation, the contemporary viability of the historically established features of new towns with their difference from other town types: from the aspects of either urban or social structural or spatial social position. The subsequent points of the scale are representing the transformation processes, the end points are fixing the now typical states and at the same time they express the new towns' convergence tendencies to other town types, the trends of harmonisation with today's urban systems and the trends of integration. According to this, contemporary new towns have preserved something important from the past in terms of all the analysed dimensions, from the "artificial" town nature and at the same time in all the examined dimensions transformation and strong convergence to the characteristic features of other town types can be detected.

One advantage of the scale analysis is that it highlights the similarities and differences. Another advantage is that it demonstrates multi-factor differentiation between the new towns and draws the attention to the evolution of spatial, social inequalities between new towns, a so far not experienced spatial form of social inequality in the Eastern and the Central European including the Hungarian settlement network. This new spatial social inequality system has developed as a consequence of the 1989-1990 social, political and economic changes, their processes, and the mechanisms determining the transition, but historical heritage had also played a role in it.

So for the time being there is no question that the past and its effects have disappeared. Based on today's facts, it seems that there will always be differences between the two types of urban development model and their characteristics, but what these differences will be, depends on the development pathways of cities, on the innovation capacity of different models as well, and what the stakeholder local and regional social actors will do with their historical heritage.

The future processes are clearly unpredictable. It is not yet known what will happen in the future with today's constantly changing post-socialist new towns. What factors will be stronger, the differences or the convergence processes? This depends on a number of micro- and macro-mechanisms and their impacts as well. On this basis, the real question today is not whether this new model has been created or not, but rather what the new towns will do with their heritage. Are they able to build on the peculiarities they exclusively possess? Are they able to build on their past, on their special architectural endowments, on the activities of the inhabitants who are committed to their town? Are they able to actually accommodate the economic and social requirements of today and are they able to act for the benefit of transition? Are they able to renew? Do they have the ability to establish smaller and broader regional cooperation frameworks where cooperation, the joint exploitation of benefits and not the individual competition, and not the other party's displacement is the goal? These questions are not only to be answered in the future, but the answers to them may decide the future of the new towns and the organisational structures of the potential new models of urban development as well.