



Residential satisfaction of elderly in the city centre: The case of revitalizing neighbourhoods in Prague

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ABSTRACT

While the historical cores of the post-socialist cities of Central and Eastern Europe are adapting to the invasion of tourism and profitable companies, dynamic regeneration is altering the character of the inner-city neighbourhoods from working class peripheries to modern multi-functional urban sub-centres. Changing residential environments, landscapes and functions affect the daily lives and residential satisfaction of the local population, and especially of the low-income and elderly people facing mobility restrictions. This research evaluates the residential satisfaction of the elderly in two Prague city centre neighbourhoods that experienced dramatic changes in their residential environment during the post-socialist transition: the historical core, which has been exposed to massive touristification and commercialization, and a former working class neighbourhood that has been experiencing rapid regeneration. The local accessibility of services, public spaces, housing and social support was examined through a questionnaire survey. Contrary to our expectations based on the existing literature review, the results show that, despite the rapid revitalization processes, the elderly are fairly satisfied with their residential environment in both neighbourhood types.

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, vigorous changes in the socio-spatial configuration, physical landscape and functional structure of post-socialist cities and urban neighbourhoods have taken place (Enyedi, 1998; Ouředníček & Temelová, 2009; Ruoppila & Kährik, 2003; Temelová, Novák, Ouředníček, & Puldová, 2011). Dramatic transformations have been apparent in central parts of the major CEE cities (Feldman, 2000; Kiss, 2002; Szirmai, 2006; Temelová, 2007). In Prague, rapid regeneration is transforming some of the inner city neighbourhoods from working class peripheries to modern city sub-centres with new offices, shopping malls, entertainment centres and high-end housing (Temelová, 2007). In the historical core, touristification and commercialization, among other forces, have led to the displacement of cheaper stores and to the spread of specific (and often luxury) services aimed at tourists and wealthy residents (Hoffman & Musil, 1999; Musil, 1993; Simpson, 1999). The changing residential environment, landscape and functions affect the quality of life and the residential satisfaction of the local population in their home neighbourhoods. People who are attached to neighbourhoods on an everyday basis, that is the elderly population, are particularly sensitive to these changes. Their daily movements and activities mostly take place in the area

surrounding their homes (Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Musil, 1982). Urban revitalization thus influences the living environment as a place where the daily activities of the elderly take place. Since many seniors grow older in their long-term place of residence, transformations related to urban restructuring are often perceived as stress factors in their lives (Phillips, Siu, Yeh, & Cheng, 2005).

Mostly rooted in the experience of Western cities, there is a body of literature that discusses the harmful influence of urban revitalization on the everyday lives of the indigenous residents. The loss of affordable housing, the displacement of cheaper shops selling daily goods, the privatization of public space and community deterioration have been particularly criticized (e.g. Atkinson, 2004; Cybriwsky, 1978; Madanipour, 1996; Mangen, 2004; Sassen, 1996). Similarly, revitalization processes in post-socialist cities have often been blamed for the generally negative impacts they generate on the original population, and on the elderly in particular (e.g. Musil, 1993; Simpson, 1999; Temelová, Dvořáková, & Slezáková, 2010; Węclawowicz, 1998). Despite the anticipated negative effects of revitalization, however, little empirical attention has been paid to the quality of life and residential satisfaction of the elderly population in these revitalizing neighbourhoods. This is particularly true for the CEE cities. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by evaluating the residential satisfaction of elderly people living in some Prague neighbourhoods which have been exposed to revitalization during the post-socialist transition. Are local elderly people satisfied or not with their daily life in these neighbourhoods? From

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the elderly point of view, the transformation of neighbourhoods means the loss of familiar environments and the need for adaptation, which can significantly affect everyday lives and independence. In a time of ageing urban populations, the knowledge of their residential perceptions and demands in transforming urban environments is thus a great challenge for age-friendly urban planning and not only in post-socialist cities.

The residential satisfaction of the elderly is investigated using case studies of two Prague city centre neighbourhoods: the historical centre of Prague (Prague 1), an area exposed to mass tourism and intense commercial development, and a former working class neighbourhood (central Smíchov) which has been experiencing dynamic commercial and residential regeneration. Building on the concept of residential satisfaction we designed a questionnaire survey to evaluate elderly persons' perceptions of changing environmental quality. The residential satisfaction of elderly people is discussed against the context of an age-appropriate living environment (e.g. Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Gabriel & Bowling, 2004; Musil, 1982) and the debate on the social and everyday effects of urban revitalization (e.g. Atkinson, 2004; Beauregard, 1990; Cybriwsky, 1978; Madanipour, 1996).

Residential satisfaction of the elderly and urban revitalization

Residential satisfaction is a conceptual criterion in the evaluation of perceived quality of life in neighbourhoods (Amérgo & Aragonés, 1997). It is formed by the subjective perception of the degree to which individuals' residential needs are fulfilled and is affected by an array of housing, neighbourhood, and individual attributes (Galster & Hesser, 1981). It is one of the ways to evaluate the quality of urban environment, usually by neighbourhood residents. For elderly people, the quality of the residential environment, or a precisely objectively defined environment in the words of Golant (1984), provides the context for their everyday life, inevitable and leisure activities, mobility and social participation. The preconditions of the environment support an independent lifestyle, one of the most important attributes of high-quality life in old age (Föbker & Grotz, 2006).

The activity space of elderly people narrows depending on their physical abilities and on their financial resources. The majority of daily activities and movements of elderly people are undertaken on foot in the immediate surroundings of the house and neighbourhood (Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Musil, 1982). Therefore distance is the crucial dimension of space in the everyday life of elderly people, especially in relation to the accessibility of shops, services and social contacts (Sýkorová, 2008). With the shrinking activity space the conditions within the immediate living environment increase in importance (Golant et al., 1984). The local environment largely dictates the opportunities for daily activities and mobility of the elderly residents and also determines their satisfaction with their neighbourhoods and urban living in general. There is evidence that people in their old age tend to express residential dissatisfaction if facilities intended for their use are not located within a certain critical walking distance of their residence (Golant et al., 1984).

There is considerable literature discussing age-friendly cities and the qualities of neighbourhoods that best meet the needs of elderly residents. Gabriel and Bowling (2004) demonstrated that living in a neighbourhood that is perceived to give pleasure, feels safe, is neighbourly and offers access to facilities and services is one of the central dimensions of the quality of later life. The importance of safe, affordable and well-running public transport has been stressed in many places (Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Gabriel & Bowling, 2004). Age-friendly neighbourhoods also offer public spaces where older people are able to relax, meet and interact with respect to their limited mobility (Musil, 1982). Importantly the sensitivity of the elderly to perceived threats makes safety issues a prime

demand on the residential environment (Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Pain, 1997). Anxiety about crime affects the daily activities and restricts the mobility of the elderly, particularly when places perceived as unsafe are avoided. Further, research findings show that social cohesion, participation and trust increase the residential satisfaction of elderly urban residents (Mollenkopf et al., 1997; Oh, 2003). The importance of friends and neighbours in the social support system of the elderly is particularly important due to their stronger attachment to place and local community (Cantor, 1975; Sýkorová, 2008).

Neighbourhoods in city centres contain both pull factors of the destination areas as well as negative effects on the living conditions of the elderly population. Comparative research by Föbker and Grotz (2006) suggested that central districts provide physically better infrastructure and therefore better preconditions for an independent and active lifestyle in latter age than areas on the urban fringe. On the one hand, traditional urban neighbourhoods with mixed services, short distances between home and facilities and good pedestrian access encourage walking among the elderly residents and protect them from dependency on assistance (Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Patterson & Chapman, 2004). On the other hand, high living costs, crime, traffic, changing population make-up and weak social bonds were perceived as the most serious problems of living in big cities (Fokkema, Gierveld, & Nijkamp, 1996). Obviously, contemporary urban restructuring and revitalization processes alter the living environment of the neighbourhoods in many ways and thus further influence the residential satisfaction of the elderly.

Urban revitalization means bringing new life into cities and upgrading areas for 'higher' social and economic uses (Beauregard & Holcomb, 1981). The invasion of new and progressive functions and of wealthier residents and consumers results in a wide range of neighbourhood transformations, including physical upgrading, land-use adaptations, residential mobility and changes in population composition, rising rents and property prices as well as place image enhancement (Aitken, 1990; Atkinson, 2004; Beauregard & Holcomb, 1981; Cybriwsky, 1978; Temelová, 2009). Yet, in the words of Mangen (2004, p. 174), "positive outcomes, for some elements of the population, may exacerbate the social situation of others". So, while revitalization processes refashion neighbourhoods in the image of newcomers, at the same time they place everyday pressures on the original residents, particularly the low-income and elderly households.

The influence of rising rents and housing prices on indigenous residents has been all too often discussed by urban scholars, particularly in relation to gentrification (Atkinson, 2004; Beauregard, 1990; Cybriwsky, 1978). Low-income families, the elderly and female-headed households, in particular, are endangered by the loss of affordable housing or displacement from neighbourhoods (Atkinson, 2004; Palen & London, 1984). Rising rents and land values induced by revitalization may also have a damaging effect on local businesses (Bianchini, Dawson, & Evans, 1992; Mangen, 2004). Sassen (1996), for example, pointed to the replacement of neighbourhood shops tailored to the everyday needs of local residents by upscale boutiques and restaurants catering to the high-income urban elite in attractive neighbourhoods of the major cities. The altered structure of local facilities and increased costs worsen the possibilities for local inhabitants to supply their everyday needs in their place of residence (Atkinson, 2004; Cybriwsky, 1978). Madanipour (1996) noted that new developments and regeneration policies intensify the threats to public space through its privatization, control and restriction of the access. From a social point of view, Cybriwsky (1978) demonstrated how the revitalization of a neighbourhood brought the deterioration of the local distinctive lifestyle, the weakening of close social contacts, and a slackening of internal control mechanisms for maintaining order in the local community (see also

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