



**A CHARACTERISTIC DEVELOPMENT  
OF INDIVIDUAL, DETACHED  
SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSES WITH  
HIGH FENCES IN THE VILLAGE  
OF CHORVÁTSKY GROB**

CHARAKTERISTICKÁ ZÁSTAVBA  
SAMOSTATNE STOJACICH  
RODINNÝCH DOMOV S VYSOKÝMI  
PLOTMI V OBCI CHORVÁTSKY GROB

**Photo** Foto: Martin Šveda

# Let it Sprawl: Post-Socialist Policies Enabling Suburbanization

Sídelná kaša: postsocialistické politiky umožňujúce suburbanizáciu

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Suburbanizačné procesy v zázemí Bratislavy predstavujú jednu z najvýznamnejších sociálno-priestorových transformácií v postsocialistickej histórii Slovenska. Za posledných 25 rokov bolo v malých mestách a vidieckych sídlach v okolí Bratislavy vybudovaných vyše 50-tisíc bytových jednotiek a pribudlo viac ako 90-tisíc prihlásených obyvateľov. Trend sídelnej decentralizácie v rámci dynamicky rastúceho metropolitného regiónu v mnohom kontrastuje so sídelným vývojom obdobia štátneho socializmu, počas ktorého centrálna riadená a plánovaná sídelná transformácia i priemyselná urbanizácia priniesli doteraz najintenzívnejší urbanistický rozvoj a sídelnú transformáciu územia Slovenskej republiky. Napriek tomu, že ideály priestorovej spravodlivosti v podobe homogenizovanej sídelnej štruktúry postupne ustupovali pragmatickým požiadavkám ekonomickej efektívnosti v podobe posilnenia princípov regionálnej koncentrácie a aglomerácie, ani takto redefinované strategické ciele nepriniesli výraznejšie suburbanizačné tendencie v zázemí hlavných mestských centier SSR, Bratislavu nevynímajúc.

Intenzívny rozvoj predmestí v podobe rezidenčných oblastí s relatívne nízkou hustotou dopravne obsluhovaných prevažne individuálnou automobilovou dopravou, bol umožnený až splnením viacerých podmienok zrejúcej postsocialistickej tranzície meniacej vzťahy na niekoľkých mierkových úrovniach. Okrem všeobecných zmien v podobe posilnenia významu súkromných aktérov angažujúcich sa v sídelnom rozvoji, privatizácie a komodifikácie bývania prinášajúce rozdiely v jeho dostupnosti v rámci regiónu dennej dochádzky, zohrali

úlohu reformy štátnej a verejnej správy spojené s decentralizáciou a fragmentáciou administratívnych a plánovacích kapacít. Vznik a posilňovanie regionálnych disparít a obmedzená schopnosť adresovať ich prostredníctvom regionálnych politík realizovaných na národnej úrovni ovplyvňuje medziregionálne migračné pohyby smerujúce do Bratislavy a jej zázemia. Deklarovaný cieľ posilnenia demokracie prostredníctvom decentralizácie vo výsledku priniesli roztrieštenú štruktúru správy brániacu komplexnému a udržateľnému mestskému plánovaniu. Často neplánovaný a nedostatočne regulovaný rozvoj sa uskutočňuje na základe rozhodnutí prijímaných na úrovni obcí, zatiaľ čo regionálna úroveň verejnej správy, teda úroveň, ktorá by mohla obsiahnuť rozvojové otázky v rozsahu metropolitnej oblasti, nemá kapacitu účinne regulovať alebo korigovať rozhodnutia prijaté nižšie.

Aktuálne procesy suburbanizácie v bratislavskom zázemí by nemali byť chápané ako prirodzený alebo nevyhnutný proces, ale ako výsledok konkrétnych politických rozhodnutí a ideologických posunov. V stále prevládajúcom naratívne sa často prehliada umelá povaha suburbánnej expanzie a s ňou spojené problémy, najmä uhlíková náročnosť takéhoto priestorového riešenia. Pri hľadaní odpovedí na environmentálne a sociálne problémy spojené so suburbanizáciou treba hľadať príležitosti na prehodnotenie a presmerovanie politík mestského plánovania smerom k udržateľnejším a ekologicky zodpovednejším modelom, teda k návratu spoločensky definovaného ideálu vyjadreného aj priestorovou štruktúrou.

Suburbanization processes in the hinterland of Bratislava represent one of the most significant socio-spatial transformations in the post-socialist history of Slovakia<sup>1</sup>. Over the last 25 years, 50 thousand dwellings have been built in the small towns and villages around Bratislava and the population has grown by 90 thousand registered residents. The extensive construction of family and apartment houses, production and warehouse complexes, as well as service infrastructure has affected practically all the settlements around the capital and changed the character of this region. The intensive social and economic development of suburban areas is driven by the massive migration flows of the population throughout the country, causing the settlement structure around the capital to change significantly under their influence. Thus, after 1989, not only in the Bratislava metropolitan region but across the European post-socialist space, a general acceptance has prevailed of suburbanization as an integral and inevitable process of urban growth under the conditions of capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

While in Western Europe and North America, the intensive development of suburbs in the form of low-density residential areas serviced predominantly by individual automobile transportation was



**STANDARDISED RESIDENTIAL  
CONSTRUCTION IN THE VILLAGE  
OF DUNAJSKÁ LUŽNÁ**

TYPIZOVANÁ REZIDENČNÁ  
ZÁSTAVBA V OBCI  
DUNAJSKÁ LUŽNÁ

Photo Foto: Martin Šveda



**SUBURBAN RESIDENTIAL  
CONSTRUCTION IS OFTEN  
REALISED WITHOUT ANY  
CONSIDERATION OF THE ORIGINAL  
SETTLEMENT STRUCTURE**

SUBURBÁNNÁ REZIDENČNÁ  
VÝSTAVBA SA ČASTO REALIZUJE  
BEZ NADVÁZNOSTI NA PŮVODNÚ  
SÍDELNÚ ZÁSTAVBU

Photo Foto: Martin Šveda

already present at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic had aspirations toward different visions of the urbanisation process. At the core of these was a concentrated social effort towards the creation of a new society and its corresponding spatial solutions. One consequence of the implementation of contemporary strategies of settlement development and urbanisation management was the virtual absence of suburbanisation processes. At first glance, it is obvious that the current dynamics respond to different social conditions, are driven by different political and economic principles and involve a more complex structure of key actors, where levels of decentralised public administration and more rights-armed forms of private interests have been added compared to the past, placing the current wider processes of suburbanisation and post-socialist urban or settlement development in contrast with the ideas and practice of socialist urbanisation. The aim of the present paper is to examine the main ideological underpinnings and implemented public policies that have influenced and are influencing processes of settlement development, urban growth and decentralisation tendencies within urban regions. In the text, we would like to address to what extent the current processes can be considered as the antithesis of the developmental dynamics of the previous period or whether (and to what extent) we can identify continuities linking the processes of settlement transformation of two seemingly so different periods? In what ways, then, did the main parameters of the management of the urbanization process differ between the periods of state socialism and post-socialist capitalism, and how did these promote or prevent suburbanization processes?

Methodologically, this article focuses on examination of mostly geographical literature and an analysis of policies influencing the suburbanization process in Bratislava within the broader historical and geographical context. In the following pages, we first review the development of ideas and settlement-planning practices in the period of state socialism and their impact on suburbanization processes, while attempting to identify the key mechanisms limiting the decentralising tendencies of the agglomerations of the ČSSR and outlining the dynamics in the Bratislava region. Subsequently, we focus on the pillars of the post-socialist reform agenda, which together created the conditions that stimulated the development of suburbanization processes and enabled their realisation to the extent observed today. The investigation underscores the multiscalar nature of post-socialist public policies, differing from the top-down, centrally planned approaches characteristic of the socialist era. Therefore, we analyse policies realised not only at the national level but also regional and municipal scales, recognizing the diverse array of actors, interests, and influences shaping the contemporary urban landscape.

## Settlement Development and Spatial Planning in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic

The managed social transformation of the state-socialist era also had its spatial and urbanist aspect. Idealism and utopian dimensions in the aspiration of building a new society, as necessary in the understanding of the tasks and goals of spatial planning and urbanisation, was most pronounced in the early stages of the state-socialist project. Much of the inspiration referred to Soviet planning ideology and practice, which, however, was itself undergoing its own development, resolving internal ideological disputes and answering the need for pragmatic adjustments to accepted ideals and concepts. One such encounter, which later recurred in various forms in the discussions of Czechoslovak planners, was the localisation argument between 'decentralists' and 'centralists'. While the first group, referring to the rather vague theses of Marx and Engels, stressed the importance of the decentralisation of industrial production and the general coverage and greatest possible balance in the spatial availability of goods and services, the second group pointed to the technological efficiency of concentrating industrial production in urban centres and regional clusters, necessary for general social development.<sup>3</sup>

The confrontation of these two contradictory ideas is visible in the first urbanisation strategy in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic<sup>4</sup>, represented by the model of the centre-based settlement system. Originally proposed by a group of Czech urban planners at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, the document became the basis of official spatial development policy in Czechoslovakia<sup>5</sup>. The theoretical fundament referred to the Central Cities Theory formulated by the eminent geographer and Nazi planner Walter Christaller<sup>6</sup>. The skeleton of the settlement was to be a hierarchical system of central settlements, to represent the focal points of spatial development, provide services to the inhabitants in their catchment area, and serve as the target of investment. In turn, the emphasis on the service and distribution function of settlement centres would ensure the elimination, or at least reduction, of social disparities between settlements of different levels', in expectation of "a convergence and mixing of the rural population with the urban population, as well as a balance in the settlement and urbanisation of the landscape"<sup>8</sup>

The system distinguished three levels of central settlements. Identified at the lowest level were settlements of local importance, which were to provide basic living needs for the inhabitants of smaller non-central villages in their hinterland. At a higher level were the settlements of district importance, which were to have full amenities and provide higher services for the population of the catchment area with a population of at least 50,000 inhabitants. The third and highest level consisted of the settlements of regional importance, providing the highest services to their own population and to the population of the greater surrounding area. A decisive part of the investment was to be directed to district and regional centres. At the other end of the hierarchy were rural settlements not included in the system of centres - the so-called non-central settlements, where the development potential was limited by investment constraints of public and private resources.

The first generation of the spatial settlement system<sup>9</sup> emphasised the provision of service functions of by the centres, which would be distributed as evenly as possible across the country. At the same time, a reduction of the settlement structure was considered. Such strategies came into conflict with economic constraints where, for example, the uniform distribution of industry across the country ran into efficiency issues. Nevertheless, the settlement centre system was intended as a means regulating planned development and directly influencing the spatial distribution of investment for a certain period of time. Gradually, however, it proved too schematic and directive, underestimating the importance and influence of spontaneous but unpredictable and unplannable development factors. Despite regulation, settlements developed where the central system did not foresee them and, conversely, development planned for other locations failed to materialise. Thus, by the 1980s, the centrality system gradually lost its regulatory function and disappeared from official documents.<sup>10</sup>

The second generation of the settlement-system conception, represented in Slovakia by the 'Project of Urbanisation of the SSR'<sup>11</sup>, responded to such criticisms. In addition to reflecting and modifying the centre system, the concept abandoned any consistent decentralist positions and acknowledged the importance of metropolitan and regional concentration for the efficient development and performance of selected economic activities, especially industrial production. Egalitarian ideals and objectives centred on social services and distribution were abandoned, while goals of economic efficiency gained in importance. In addition to a system of evenly distributed centres, it

**GROWTH INDEXES IN THE  
BRATISLAVA FUNCTIONAL URBAN  
REGION IN THE PERIOD 1970–2020**

INDEXY RASTU V BRATISLAVSKOM  
FUNKČNOM MESTSKOM REGIÓNE  
V OBDOBÍ 1970 – 2020

**Data source** Zdroj dát: Statistical  
Office of the Slovak Republic

**Author** Autor: Martin Šveda



therefore defines, for example, regional agglomerations with a core, associated centres of population and major centres of population. In spite of various adjustments that theoretically made it possible to promote and develop suburban settlement tendencies within metropolitan regions, in practice these were materialised only to a very limited extent. On the contrary, the concentrated development of employment opportunities, together with massive housing construction in the cities, in most cases caused the population in urban centres to exceed the expected number of inhabitants<sup>12</sup>. The practical consequence was a developmental preference for smaller and medium-sized towns, and later especially district towns, while the processes of metropolisation and suburbanization were suppressed<sup>13</sup>.

General assessments of the consequences of the application of settlement planning strategies in a particular area are well illustrated by the demographic development of the municipalities of the Bratislava hinterland. The first four cartograms in Figure 1 capture the growth dynamics of the municipalities of the current commuting region between 1970 and 1990. Apart from Bratislava itself, only a few municipalities maintained significant growth throughout the whole period, mainly the towns and centres of district importance Pezinok and Senec, partly Šamorín, but not Stupava. The restrictive dimension of the centre system undoubtedly constituted an important instrument hindering the suburbanisation process, despite the fact that the suppression of the development of the smallest settlements gradually diminished. If nowadays several tens or hundreds of building permits for private family houses are issued annually in the town of Chorvátsky Grob, in the 1980s it was possible to issue a maximum of five permits for this type of construction per year. On the other hand, the intensive urbanisation of Slovakia in this period, which took the form of the construction of prefabricated housing estates, fundamentally changed the shape not only of the cities but also of wider spatial relations, with 170 000 inhabitants being added to Bratislava alone during the 1970s and 1980s. In this context, however, it should be noted that the regulation of public and private investment was not the only limit to the urban decentralisation in socialist economies. The absence of a land market and real differences in housing prices that would decline with distance from the centre, and to a large extent the de facto decommodification of housing, led to a situation where the cost of living in the dynamically developing central cities did not exceed that of the surrounding and more distant rural villages and towns, creating the conditions for the absence of a more fundamental incentive to move to the hinterland.<sup>14</sup>

## Post-Socialist Conditions of Spatial Dynamics

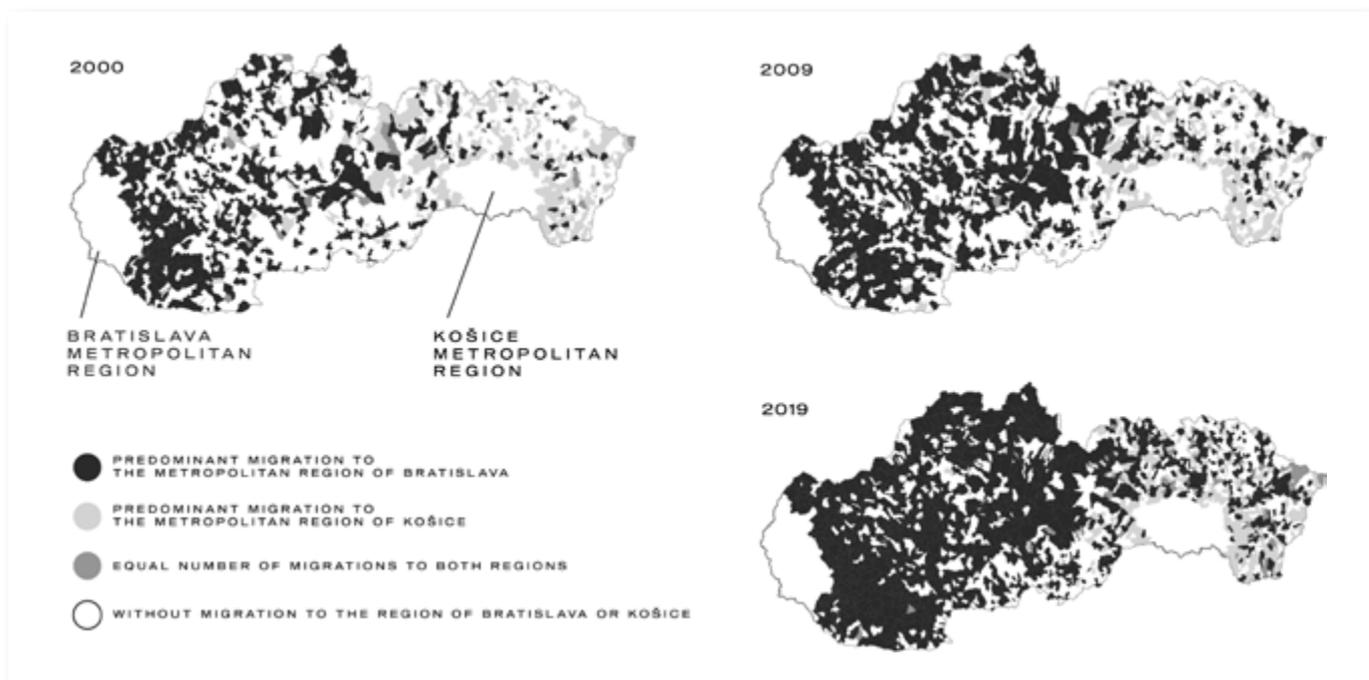
Socialist urbanisation significantly transformed the settlement system of the Slovak Republic; the end of the project of state socialism, in turn, provided the conditions for a new model of spatial and settlement development. Although the population dynamics of the first half of the 1990s did not yet show signs of intensive processes of suburbanisation, it was already possible to observe hints of future trends, the most significant of which was the slowdown in Bratislava's growth, later to fall into negative numbers for a decade, while the rural and small-town surroundings were to experience the most significant demographic and construction boom in history.

And although the manifestations of urban decentralization were not always clearly identifiable in the first half of the 1990s, the early stages of social transformation formed the moment when the forces that transformed metropolitan areas across post-socialist Europe were unleashed. Among the defining factors of the historical dynamic were the then widely accepted pillars of neoliberal doctrine, which quickly became the key ideological platform steering the course of social transformation and defining several of its crucial moments. At its core were ideas emphasising the importance of the market, the minimal state, and individual choice as key instruments for securing economic, social and political well-being. In its radical reconceptualisation of the role and function of the state and the public sphere in general, the new ideological foundation most forcefully differentiated itself from its predecessor<sup>15</sup>. The problems of post-socialist institution-building present in all spheres of social life particularly affected areas such as planning, which within the new dominant discourse was viewed with the utmost suspicion and in contradiction to the desired free-market system<sup>16</sup>. Thus, the public sphere was not only to resign itself to the role of an active economic actor or builder and provider of housing<sup>17</sup>, but even to withdraw to a large extent from the spheres of spatial planning and building regulation, or even the sphere of the formulation of the general public interest, since the latter had already been fulfilled by the enforcement of basic market principles<sup>18</sup>. All that remained was to wait and watch as the invisible hand built a better society and its corresponding spatial solution. The result was the inclusion of the long-awaited decentralisation tendencies in urban development, welcomed by public officials as well as many academics as both a "return to the natural development trajectory" of cities<sup>19</sup> and a sign of convergence with developed countries<sup>20</sup>.

Specific features of the socialist economy, such as the emphasis on the redistribution of social wealth and the decommodification of much of the housing sphere, are often cited as key determinants of the specific socio-spatial structure of socialist cities in general and the absence of suburbanization in particular. Privatisation of the housing stock led to its commodification, while the privatisation of agricultural land and the differentiation of land prices in the newly established market relations brought opportunities for exploitation of the differences between the current price and the potential development value of agricultural land in the urban periphery. The attractiveness of such opportunities grew with the potential demand, related on the one hand to the growth of wealth (albeit selectively distributed) associated with integration into the system of global capitalism, and on the other to the supply constraints imposed by inherited urbanism, where alternative forms of housing were notably absent.

Apart from the state, other public collective actors, such as municipalities and cooperatives, similarly withdrew from the sphere of housing production, leaving it to private actors whose capacities were relatively limited, especially in the early stages of the transition. Housing policy in the early 1990s was highly restricted, in the sense that it had no ambition to ensure state-controlled housing construction, social housing, or any dependence on large-scale state support for housing. Although instruments of state support for housing development are now gradually emerging, the key role is rapidly being assumed by the private banking sector, whose financial products provide the most important source of financing for the growing residential construction<sup>21</sup>.

Suburbanisation is, in a narrow sense, a process of urban decentralisation, but it is produced by relationships at different scales. International or global influences have already been indicated in the implementation of elements of neoliberal concepts and the strategies, public policies and norms derived from them into national regulatory practice. These have shaped the form of social transformation and the three main pillars represented by the privatization of state and public assets, the decentralization of political power and the exercise of public administration, and the deregulation of economic activities<sup>22</sup>. Among other public policies implemented at the national level with a direct impact on differentiated development and the migration driven by it, we must



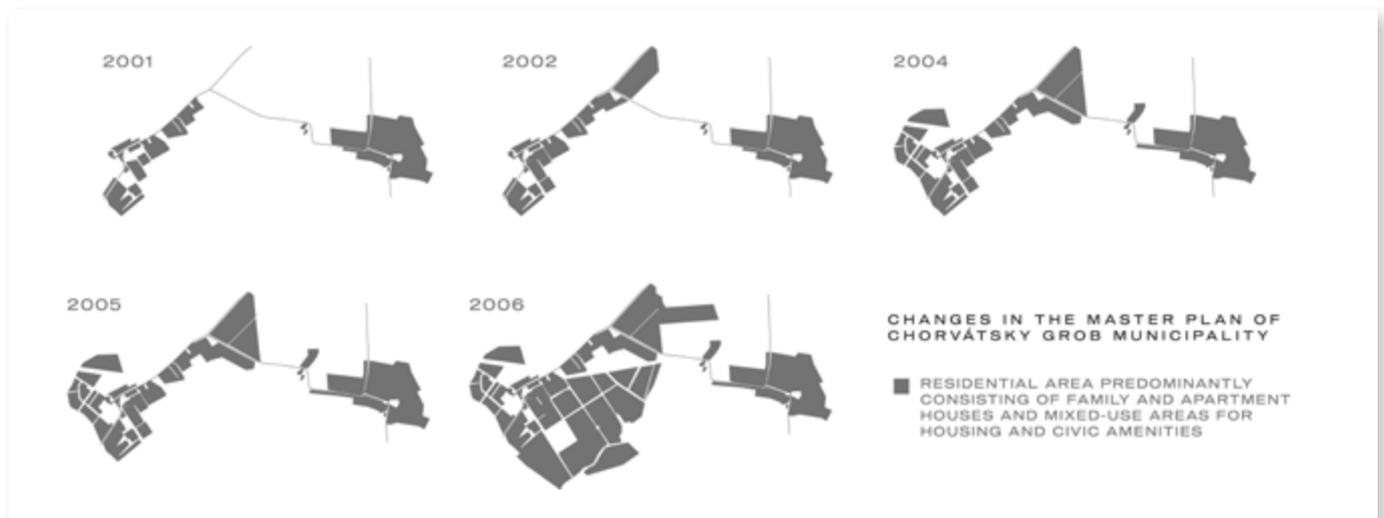
**TRACKING THE MIGRATION ATTRACTIVENESS OF BRATISLAVA AND KOŠICE CAN HELP US UNDERSTAND THE LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT TRENDS OF SLOVAKIA**

SLEDOVANIE MIGRAČNEJ ATRAKTIVITY BRATISLAVY A KOŠÍC NÁM MÔŽE POMÔCŤ POCHOPIŤ DLHODOBÉ TRENDY VÝVOJA SLOVENSKA

**Data source** Zdroj dát: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic  
**Author** Autor: Martin Šveda

consider the absence of effective policies for regional development and reducing regional disparities<sup>23</sup>. Despite the declarations present in various documents on interventions targeted at eliminating spatial inequalities and promoting the competitiveness of lagging regions, where we can find a faint echo of the ideals of intervention in territorial and settlement development, it must be stated that the public sphere is not able to fully implement these ends. The result is a movement of labour and capital from east to west, while their concentration in the larger cities causes increasing agglomeration of economic activities in urban centres, associated in the regions of western Slovakia with economic growth. On the other hand, lagging regions are not sufficiently supported by regional policy instruments and their development is significantly slower<sup>24</sup>. These processes result in a wide range of socio-economic problems in the affected regions, such as poverty, income disparities, or the existence of segregated communities<sup>25</sup>, which together create additional pressures on migration movements. Its parameters then serve as a testimonial on the effectiveness of public regional development policies. The result is the long-term economic and demographic strengthening of western Slovakia and Bratislava in particular. This process can be illustrated by the historical development of exclusive migration to the metropolitan regions of Bratislava and Košice (Fig. 2). It can be observed that only in the last 20 years the “gravitational” attraction of Bratislava has significantly strengthened and its influence has reached far into eastern Slovakia.

Similar to the withdrawal from the regional policy sphere, there is a lack of more fundamental ambition at the regional level of government, a scale linking the state to the local level, which could play a crucial and indispensable role in the management of suburbanisation. In the past, it was the latter that mediated the actions of the centre to the local levels and concentrated a number of control functions. For example, the Regional National Committees (KNVs) were also responsible for identifying settlements of local importance, i.e. the lowest level of the central settlements system, which gave them the opportunity to influence spatial relations and development within their own territory. However, as part of the process of decentralisation of political power, it was this level that was most emptied in terms of real administrative functions and regulatory and planning capacities. In fact, as early as in 1990, the Slovak National Council (SNR) adopted Act No. 472/1990 Coll. on the organisation of local state administration, which abolished the administrative regional level “as a symbol of the previous political regime”<sup>26</sup>. The process of reconstituting this intermediary stage, first as a level of state administration (1996) and later as a local government level (2001), was marked by the present centralist tendencies and politicisation of the search for an optimal territorial solution, as well as by disagreements over the extent to which local governments should be empowered and their fiscal autonomy increased, several of which persist to this day<sup>27</sup>. While



**CHANGES IN THE MASTER PLAN OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF CHORVÁTSKY GROB**

ZMENY VŠEOBECNÉHO ÚZEMNÉHO PLÁNU OBCE CHORVÁTSKY GROB

**Data source** Zdroj dát: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

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specific cases may differ in detail, a general lack of strategic and spatial planning capacity at the regional level links several countries in post-socialist Europe. In metropolitan regions across the post-socialist space, then, we can observe how significant production, service or settlement centres emerge only by the decision of local governments and without closer planning cooperation.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in the immediate surroundings of Bratislava, the decision of a few municipal councillors then representing a small rural community created the expectation for the emergence of a city-sized settlement of 50 000<sup>29</sup>.

The case of planning and regulatory capacities is thus confronted on the one hand by the devolution of the most important planning and regulatory capacities to the lowest level, and on the other hand by the generally prevalent fiscal problems of local governments, manifested, among other things, by the constraints on strategic capacities<sup>30</sup>. The competition for (private) resources between municipalities then inevitably leads to conditions that favour the actors with capital. And since these same actors naturally seek low-risk, high-reward opportunities, the result is a selective urbanism of growing satellites, where residential development or commercial real estate development is prioritised. Left undeveloped are often less profitable areas for the development of elements of social, environmental infrastructure reliant on scarce public resources<sup>31</sup>.

The institutional neglect of the professional fields of spatial planning and development regulation then leads to a shift towards so-called ‘opportunity-led planning’<sup>32</sup>. This term represents a shift in planning practice from the original goal of comprehensive control and management of spatial and urban development toward procedures that allow for the implementation of piecemeal development initiatives. The promotion of public development and “entrepreneurial” strategies, in turn, is most often feasible through the promotion of any private economic activities, real estate sales, or other forms of support for private sector activities. The result is a specific form of residential development management based on a symbiotic relationship between real estate operating capital and the local political elite. The problem with this approach is the creation of a planning system associated with a disproportionate distribution of opportunities to influence spatial development between property owners and non-owners, and the tensions and conflicts that arise. Struggles around questions of the purpose and the public for urban and suburban space thus remain part of (local) political life.

The contextualisation of the processes of suburbanisation presented here is essential for understanding the complexity of the relationships underpinning the current dynamics and for seeking answers to the questions of how to tame the forces responsible for them. However, as Kiril Stanilov and Luděk Sýkora<sup>33</sup> point out, anything less than coordinated metropolitan development, i.e. a plan involving regional and local levels consolidated by strong public support and institutional backing, has no chance for the desired success. And even though several instances can be documented of gradual changes in perceptions and understandings of the suburbanization process and the role of local governments<sup>34</sup>, the path to the implementation of new planning practice involving alternative vision of metropolitan development is associated with a number of institutionalised

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obstacles, including e.g. the persistent impossibility of metropolitan coordination of truly autonomous planning and regulatory units represented by individual municipalities<sup>35</sup>.

## The Future of the Metropolitan Region?

In reflection, the trajectory of urban planning and spatial regulation policies in Bratislava reveals a complex narrative marked by both hindrances and enabling factors for suburbanization. State-led and planned settlement transformation and industrial urbanisation have so far brought the most intensive urban development and settlement transformation of the territory of the Slovak Republic. Yet the ideals, goals, strategies and actual practical implementation of the urbanisation and spatial development project in the period of state socialism themselves changed over time. At their core were at first efforts to achieve, or at least approach, the ideals of a fair spatial structure, which gradually gave way to the pragmatic requirements of economic efficiency, expressed by emphasising the principles of concentration and agglomeration. However, even such redefined strategic goals did not bring about more significant decentralisation trends around the main urban centres, which had to wait for materialisation till particular conditions of post-socialist transformation had been met.

The impact of socialist centralization on suburban development gave way to a post-socialist era characterised by the dominance of neoliberal ideologies, accompanied by decentralisation and the fragmentation of political and administrative power. The shift towards market-driven approaches was often translated into unchecked urban sprawl. Though seemingly empowering, decentralisation has at times devolved into a fractured governance structure, impeding coherent and sustainable urban planning. We have tried here to capture the multiscalarity of the processes leading to the intensive development of the non-central spaces of the metropolitan region. These are the result of intra-regional and inter-regional migratory movements, the latter influenced by the effectiveness of regional policies implemented at national level. The actual development, often unplanned and poorly regulated, is carried out at the discretion of individual municipalities, while the regional level of government, a scale that could encompass the development issues of the scale of metropolitan area, does not have the capacity to effectively regulate or correct the decisions taken at the municipal level.

We also wanted to emphasise that the current suburbanization in Bratislava is not a natural or inevitable process, but the result of specific political decisions and ideological shifts. The artificial nature of suburban sprawl and the problems associated with it, especially the alarming carbon intensity<sup>36</sup> associated with this urban structure, are often overlooked in the still prevailing narrative. To address effectively the environmental and social problems associated with suburbanisation, it is necessary to denaturalise the process. Recognising the social nature of suburbanisation is an opportunity to rethink and redirect urban planning policies towards more sustainable and environmentally responsible models, i.e. to attempt a return to a socially defined ideal expressed in terms of spatial structure.

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