

Changes and recent patterns in internal residential migration in the Czech Republic, 1989-2007

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Today, just over twenty years after the fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, we can look back to the period of transformation to assess our current situation and the path that has led to it. Twenty years is a period long enough to overview not only the initial systemic reforms from totalitarian states with central planned economy to democracies with market economies, but also their repercussions. It invites reflections how the evolutions in post-communist countries resemble to each other, how they are resembling to Western European patterns, and to what extent path dependent effects are still shaping its development. The internal migration as a main driver of spatial population dynamics and its change after 1989 can be included into the broad categories of studies of transformation effects. This paper focuses on the case of the Czech Republic.

This paper studies internal inter-municipal residential migration in the Czech Republic in terms of its volume, direction and structure, as well as changes in the last twenty years and their repercussions on the demographic and social structures of the population. The municipalities (6258 units) are categorised in two spatial dimensions combining (1) the urban-rural gradient perspective with defined primary and secondary urban centres, three types of suburban areas, and rural areas. Suburban areas are defined as commuting catchment areas, distinguishing three different zones according to commuting intensity towards the urban centres. Rural areas are outside these commuting catchment areas. The regional perspective (2) distinguishes one core region (Prague) and three peripheral regions (North-West Bohemia, West-South-East Bohemia, and Moravia) according to an analysis of socio-economic differences done previously.

From a long-term perspective, the volume of migration steeply declined in the Czech Republic after 1989 with only a mild recovery after 1995. It declined from 250 000 in the year 1980 to 164 000 in 1996 and rose slowly to surpass 200 000 after 2004. Nowadays, only 2 % of the population changes residence annually, which means that one would in average change

residence once in 40-50 years which means once in lifetime¹. The essential factors in the decline of mobility were the halt in subsidised dwelling construction leading to a steep decline in housing construction in the early 1990s, a decline in centrally planned industrial production and therefore the diminished attractiveness of some towns and regions for migrants, the collapse of the socialist habit of housing provision for newly arrived workers and the financial inaccessibility of new dwellings on the free-market for a majority of the population, at least during the whole first decade of transformation. Given these transformation related elements, families' attachment to their present dwellings as often the most valuable asset owned increased yet further. People prioritized housing accessibility before employment attractiveness, accepting longer commuting distances or less attractive jobs before moving elsewhere. In 2001, 40 % of all employed persons were commuting out of the municipality of their residence to work.

Not only the volume of residential migration but also its orientation changed significantly reversing some of the long-lasting tendencies of socialist period, namely the positive net-migration gains of urban centres and universally negative net-migration of non-urban areas. The positive net in-flows to urban centres changed to negative ones in the scope of the few years between 1991 and 1995 and generally remains negative till the present days (with the exception of Prague where the positive net-inflows are the result of in-migration of foreigners). On the other hand, the previously non-attractive suburban areas have experienced population growth since the beginning of the 1990s marked by an intensifying tendency from about 2000 onwards. The differentiation of net in-flow volume between urban, suburban and rural areas is widening recently. The most dynamic evolution is clearly in suburban areas. Migration gains follow the logic of proximity to important centres of employment, with inner fringes being the most dynamic, largely outdistancing more remote suburbs and rural areas.

The recent structure of migrants analysed on the individual data among all Czech citizens changing their residence in the year 2004 (179 746 cases) has shown that decentralisation in the form of suburbanisation takes place around urban centres. Young adults with children as well as older economically actives are moving there. Mostly higher and middle social classes can afford this model. The lower social classes move more frequently to further suburban areas. The demographic structure of suburban immigrants should imply a rejuvenation of the local age structure and the rise of natural increase and fertility rates. This could not be proved yet by the present analysis. The data about cohort

¹ Moreover, the decline would be steeper, if the number of municipalities had not risen by one third in the early 1990s.

fertility and age structure from 2001 have not shown important differences with other spatial categories. The natural increase of 2001-2005 has shown small but already significant difference between inner suburban fringes of primary urban centres and other spatial categories. Suburbanisation is thus a very recent phenomenon with rising volume, and still in mid-2000s, with hardly measurable impact on demographic structures. Further population dispersal behind the suburban areas is observable only since about 2000s. Local urban centres are losing population and are unattractive for migrants of younger ages. Rural areas' migration gains are mainly due to the lower educated, especially those aged 45plus. In the long-term, these migrants will not contribute to the demographic revival of these territories, although at present they compensate for natural change losses.

The analysis has shown clearly that the key factor determining migration destination is the social status of migrants, here approximated by the level of education. Life cycle stage is only of secondary importance and sex almost does not differentiate migration at all. This indicates that spatial population dynamics do not just transform the population growth of localities, but might be the main motor transforming their social profiles as well. This is particularly true for suburban areas, where immigration is most intensive, and where the social profile of immigrants often differs sharply from that of the old residents. Future studies ought to inquire whether the impact of social status on migration destination decisions rose in the course of transformation. If that was the case, it would imply that spatial mobility has only recently become one of the factors of social inequality manifestation. If not, that is if social status always played a key role, it would mean that an important turning point in residential priorities has arisen leading to a new spatial social inequality distribution.

Comparing the analysis made for the Czech Republic with the observations in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe and also in the Western Europe, I conclude that the population deconcentration namely suburbanisation takes place all over the post-communist countries having in common the basic characteristics with the "typical suburbanisers" of Western Europe from 1960s and 1970s. However, four decades of socialism have deeply altered some mechanisms driving population mobility and their consequences are still shaping spatial population dynamics today.