URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE CONFLICTS RELATED TO THE URBAN SPACE

Lajos BOROS, Péter TÓTH
University of Szeged, Department of Economic And Human Geography

Abstract. The development of the post-socialist cities is accompanied by social conflicts, which are similar to the ones that can be observed in the Western European and North American cities. In the cities certain social groups are marked as they setting back the development of the settlement. The aim is our study is examining the spatial aspects of the extreme social differences and the so called „beggars regulation” in the cities. In 2005 the city council of Szeged banned the beggars out of the city centre. We used data from a survey made by the University of Szeged (Szeged Studies), we had an own questionnaire, and we made a focal group survey in a poor people’s community. We found that the population of Szeged sympathize with the poor, however they think that being poor is mainly because of the own fault of the poor people themselves. Most people think that the city council was right to to ban the beggars out of the city centre, and many local citizens think the begging should be forbidden in everywhere. We concluded that the citizens consider the city centre is representing the whole city, and it should be clean - from the garbage and from the „unwelcomed persons” as well.

INTRODUCTION

The development of the cities is often accompanied by social conflicts. The reason can be that the results of the development are not available to everybody, or the achievements belong to certain groups to the society. Different social groups have got different goals related to the city’s development. In extreme cases several groups can become scapegoats, who are threatening the development. (Ladányi J.-Szelényi I. 2004)
our study we would like to examine one special form of the spatial social conflicts in our cities: how the spatial exclusion appears in a Hungarian city, moreover what kind of contrasts evolve among the various social groups in relation to the usage of the city space.

In spring 2005 the city council of Szeged – secondly after Kaposvár in the country – accepted a decree that forbids begging in the city centre.

The disposition was greeted with serious debates at nationwide level as well. This gave the idea to us to deal with the problem of homeless and beggars. In our survey we wanted to find out how the local residents think about the question; whether they know about the regulation, if yes, to what degree they agree with the decision and how they relate to the people who are at the edge of society. To what degree is solidarity present in Szeged towards the beggars and the homeless people? Is there a spatial exclusion on the basis of the residential opinion and if yes, to what degree is it conscious? It was an additional motivation that - at least according to the news appeared in the press – more and more city councils try (directly, that means by banning or indirectly for example by making sleeping on benches impossible) to displace the homeless people from certain places, so it is not an isolated incident but possibly the beginning of a process.

We find it important to note that the aim of our survey was not principally to characterize, criticise the social politics of the city council or the state or to offer new solutions. Our aim is the analysis of the phenomenon of the spatial exclusion and its social environment and to demonstrate what kind of contribution we can give as geographers to the inquiry of this group of questions. The examined question has got relation with the urban development that cannot be neglected as it turns out from our analysis the people who are at the bottom of the social hierarchy are in a kind of role of a scapegoat. Many think that by their presence they threaten the development of the city and also to achieve the goals set by the majority.

1. THEORETICAL QUESTIONS, CONCEPTS

In our survey we “mixed” the groups of the beggars and the homeless on purpose. The reason of this is that according to our observations the two concepts have got similar meaning; the people asked during the survey mean the same social group by both names. Because of this we examined both the beggars and the homeless people together as part of the underclass.

We feel the usage of the concept “underclass” – mainly used in sociology – appropriate in this survey because the decree itself reflects a (not very) covert social exclusion and also because of the hypothetical effect of the beggars on the tourism we presume to find a quest for a scapegoat in the act. In sociological terms the concept of underclass (in other words: “the society under society”) describes those poor people who are stricken by special problems and possess a special behavioural code, the culture of poverty. These characteristics are also true for the beggars, homeless people. However, the concept of underclass does not mean only poverty: those who belong here have not got any chance to join into the social division of labour, they rate unnecessary. They have not got a chance to/of any kind of social integration. This definition perfectly fits the groups studied by us. (Szelényi I. 2001, Ladányi J. - Szelényi I. 2004)

2. SOCIAL EXCLUSION ON THE HUNGARIAN SETTLEMENTS
The turnout of the market relations after the change of regime, in relation to this the rapid and great changes of the income differences initiated deep changes on every area of the society, which changes had significant spatial consequences among other things as well. In the cities the segregational processes have begun and strengthened. The emergence of the social groups depended on mainly how they could adapt to the market relations and this has started an intense social and spatial differentiation on the settlements, too.

The conflicts appearing in relation to the usage of urban space can not be called a new phenomenon, whereas the early urban sociology essays mention the alienation that comes from city life and the transformation of solidarity. (Nemes F. – Szelényi I. 1967, Simmel, G. 1972) The different usages of space and the rivalry, contest for spaces inside the city are described in the classical urban sociology models, among which the most well-known is the urban ecology model of the Chicago School of Sociology. (Burgess, E.W. 1972) The rivalry for the possession and control of the space can be seen from the development of the big cities till nowadays in the big cities around the world what sometimes appears in a very sharp form: as for example Mitchell, D. writes in the USA in more cases the struggle is not against poverty but poor people in some parts of the metropolises. Katz, C reports something similar in connection with a urban rehabilitation program in New York, when the district is "kept clean" from the poor, elements not fitting there, just like from industrial activity or environmental pollution. (Mitchell, D. 2001, Katz, C. 2001) Because of these one of the most important questions of the urban research nowadays has become the enquiry of the social problems inside the settlement itself (segregation, urban poverty, social exclusion etc). The urban planning also claims the surveys dealing with these kind of questions and the European Union emphasises the urban social processes and problems in its regional and social policy, too. These topics, if a little bit later, but appear in the notions in Hungary, too, most strongly perhaps in the sociological enquiries. (Kopasz M. 2004, Szirmai V. 2005)

According to the surveys in the Hungarian settlements the spatial separation, segregation of the poor and the gipsys is the most materialized, while according to the reports of the local governments the separation of the richer people is minor. In the 2003 survey of TÁRKI the separation of the poorer people on the settlements were mentioned especially on the settlements of the Alföld and this process is stronger on the bigger settlements, while the less contrast was reported on the Western- and Middle-Dunántúl. Among these the most conflict, tension among the different social groups happened in the South-Alföld region. The most important reason of the conflicts: ethnical oppositions or conflicts related to the suburbanization were the typical according to the information from the local governments. (Kopasz M. 2004)

Of course it is obvious that the conflicts usually appear not in their “pure” form, so the ethnic based oppositions can mean difference in income or the social status, too, because in many cases ethnicity itself is a factor that creates a social group because it determines many other social parameters, too (position on the labour market, income, education etc).

The differences in the quality of life and social status inside the settlements influence the political participation, too: in the city districts where the social groups who are in a worse situation live, the participation on the elections is less and less, hereby it is
possible that also the political representation of interest ability of the residents living here is going to be less. (Hegedűs G. 2006.)

On the basis of the earlier results and surveys it seems that the conflicts related to the urban space studied by us is not without a premise in the region.

3. METHODOLOGY

During our work research we collected empirical data among the residents on three different level and method and we made a content analysis on the documents related to the decree.

First, we used the results of the ”Szeged Studies” made by the Department of Sociology of the University of Szeged. The study is made every year on a sample of 1300 people that represents the population of the city by sex, age and qualification. To eliminate the problems caused by the decreasing number of samples because of the people who deny answering the method of the enclosed spare addresses is used, what means that instead of the addresses that fall out people with the same demographic characteristics are asked. The used data were collected in autumn 2004. (The survey in 2005 was taking place during the making of this study.)

Secondly, between 18th and 30th October 2005 we made our own survey through telephone with the help of a questionnaire among the residents of Szeged. The sample of the 300 people to ask was chosen at a random sampling from the telephone book of Csongrád County. Of course we are aware of the deficiency of the sampling method and the telephone survey, for example that the database serving the basis of the sampling method was not holistic but taking into consideration our possibilities probably this was the most reliable and at the same time accessible method. (Rudas T. 2006) During the data collection a little bit more than the third of the questioned people denied to answer.

Thirdly, in May 2005. we made a focus group survey among people who regularly eat at a poor people’s kitchen in Szeged. We tried to ask everybody but unfortunately many people denied answering: about one third of the people we asked did not fill in our questionnaire. Primarily we asked about their daily routes with the help of a questionnaire with mostly up in the light questions. Methodologically the method is a little bit mixture of the usual interviews and the focus group surveys. (Babbie E. 2004)

Finally, to use it as a source to content analysis we used the reports of the meetings of the city council of Szeged that are available on the internet and the proposal that initiate the decree.

The data received we processed with the help of SPSS 11.0 statistical software. The map was drawn with CorelDraw 11 imaging software.

4. RESULTS

4.1. „Szeged Studies”

The survey’s questions chiefly/primarily help us to answer the question of how the people of Szeged think about poverty and its causes.

The results of the data from 2004 show that the people of Szeged – independently of their income relations – relate to the poor and poverty uniformly. The majority (72,4%)
traces back to exterior reasons whether somebody is poor or not. In every income bracket the strongest standpoint is that the state should patronize/uphold only those who deserve it with their behaviour.

To the question about what to spend the city’s money on/for 16.2% of the respondents chose at one of the first three places the support of the poor people. They regarded the job creating, the improvement of the infrastructure of the city and the support of the health care institutions as the most important. Not even in the judgement of the support of homeless people can a significant difference be shown between the income categories. A little bit more than half of the respondents (51.6%) said that the homeless people would deserve more support than they do nowadays.

4.2. Telephone-based questionnaires

During the data collection through the telephone we asked 300 people who were chosen from the telephone book of Csongrád County by systematic random sampling. We filled in the questionnaire of 16 main questions with the help of qualified questioners. Of course the margin of error of the survey is large because of the size of the sample and that is why the results got here can not be used to make very far-reaching consequences. (Rudas T. 2006) However, by valued together with the other two surveys, completing them, we think that in spite of the smallness of the sample the data collected this way can be used.

The most important aim of the survey through the telephone was to get to know what the people in the city think about the decree, the homeless people and the beggars. By comparing the results with the representative sample of Szeged we had a chance also to contrast the attitudes towards poverty with the opinions about those who got into the most defenceless situation. As we have already mentioned about one third of the people we asked denied answering: from the sample of 300 people 193 people answered our questions.

The results of the questionnaires through telephone show that the people we asked assign greater significance to the inner causes in the formation of poverty and when someone becomes homeless or has to beg than in the representative survey at the question about poverty in general. In spite of this, three fourth of the people asked agreed with the statement that anybody can get into such situation that the beggars and the homeless people.

One third of the people answering said that they had had conflicts with the beggars. However, surprisingly they are not less giver than those who did not have any conflicts.

The great majority agreed with the statement that the homeless people and beggars worsen the cityscape and that in Szeged there is a "mafia of beggars" so the beggars do not work for themselves. According to 79% there are public places where the beggars have to be banned from and the idea that begging should be banned in the whole country had considerable support, too.

4.3. Focal group survey

During the survey we tried to define the spatial characteristics of the social separation and alienation. Where do those who are driven to the edge of society form new communities in the city? Where do they move in space? What are the most important elements and junctions of their daily routes?

In answering these questions we called for time geographic methodology’s help. In this the people we asked had to answer an interview-like open question about their routes from getting up till going to bed on an average day. However, this method is less efficient if
we look at its "strictness" so basically it is a "soft" method but its great advantage is the (perfect) labelling of locality. (Mészáros R. 1994, Letenyei L. 2004) The people questioned were regular guests at a local poor people’s kitchen (the poor people’s kitchen of the ferences monastery in the Alsóváros district of Szeged).

Figure 1 Daily routes of the visitors of the poor people’s kitchen in Szeged
(The width of the lines shows the importance of the routes)
Source: focal group survey

Figure 1 shows their daily routes in a fairly expansive length what can be explained with the fact that two places that are very important for them (poor people’s kitchen, homeless shelters) are far from each other. There are two organisations (the two homeless shelter) near the poor people’s kitchen that provide important functions so their daily movement towards the melegedő is less. What do they choose instead of this? Obviously the busier places what makes the local society’s main routes and junctions. These are mainly the Kárász Street, the Széchenyi Square and the Dóm Square. There are many shops, restaurants, religious organisations, schools etc here, where the local society’s daily movement is great. During the years of homelessness they learnt where that place is what promises the greatest "business" and profit for them by begging. So it can be seen that they have chosen the city centre that developed through history as the location of their "business” and living. But usually they do not make the business and their daily routes
alone: the homeless shelters have got an important role, whose separation can be shown in the multidimensional scaling, too.

The homeless people, who have diverged to the greatest degree from the local society, make new communities, whose primary scenes are the shelters. Here new communities are formed what appear in space and society with a new values that is different from society. These new group interests often violate the norms and laws. In this way they often face the society’s reprehension (the retention of aids, being banned from spaces etc) what alienates them even more from the majority of the society. In our opinion the decree of the city council is like this: it means a reaction to the behaviour that violates the norm what works just in the opposite way of the social integration. (Albert F. – Dávid B. 2001).

SUMMARY

On the basis of our survey we can conclude that although the solidarity is strong towards the poorest, too, in the city, banning so the spatial exclusion is strongly supported. From the results we conclude that because of the “representing” function of the city centre, big part of the population feel it acceptable, moreover necessary to eliminate and exclude from here the elements that are thought to be “not fitting there” The documents of the city council (primarily the initiative of the decree) reflect the same idea.

It turned out from the focal group survey that the decree bans the beggars from the most important parts of their daily routes and by this it criminalizing their everyday behaviour. This finally leads to that the people at the edge of society differentiate even more from the majority of the society; their everyday life becomes harder and finally their chance to reintegrate to the society, what was also little up to now, decreases even more, practically it disappears.

REFERENCES

Szélényi, I., (2001), *Szegénység, etnicitás, és a szegénység „feminizációja” az átmeneti társadalmakban - bevezetés in Szociológiai Szemle 2001/4, (pp. 5-12).