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## Reurbanisation



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# Reurbanisation

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**Reurbanisation describes a developmental phase of agglomeration areas in Western industrialised countries in which the urban core and inner cities regain social, cultural, and economic dynamics through the growth of the residential population and/or jobs. Explanations of reurbanisation refer to a complex interlocking of demographic, economic, social, and political factors.**

# 1 Origin and development of the concept

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The first mention of the term *reurbanisation* with its current meaning (also referred to as *reurbanism* or *urban resurgence*) goes back to the 1980s, when a regrowth of the population of the urban core and inner cities was observed in a few North American large urban regions (▷ *Urban regions*) (Frey 1988). In Europe, the phenomenon of reurbanisation was first taken up in the well-known ▷ *Urban development* phase model (van den Berg/Drewett/Klaasen et al. 1982), which considered ▷ *Urbanisation*, ▷ *Suburbanisation*, de-urbanisation und reurbanisation as cyclic processes of the centralisation and decentralisation of the population and employment. To that end, reurbanisation was understood as a developmental phase (although a hypothetical one that was not empirically evident at the beginning of the 1980s), during which the urban core city gained population, jobs or both disproportionately to its environs, or to its detriment. The first reurbanisation tendencies were in fact then verified for many Western and Northern European urban regions in the 1980s (Cheshire 1995).

It was only in the past two decades that the debate on reurbanisation spread and intensified: firstly in the US and England, and, since the turn of the millennium, in Germany as well. The background to this comprises two closely related, parallel processes: first, the population growth in the core cities and inner-city locations in the metropolitan regions (Birch 2005), the amount of which is astonishing; and second, the emergence of a competition-oriented urban policy on the part of large cities that focused on strengthening and profiling its centres.

Since then, the academic discussion of reurbanisation has become strongly differentiated. Most contributions are based on a quantitative understanding of the concept, focusing on the absolute or relative population changes of core cities or on changes in the proportions of various types of space in the overall population and overall employment of a country or a region (see e.g. Siedentop 2008; Geppert/Gornig 2010). A distinction is generally drawn between core cities within their administrative boundaries and their surrounding areas, and, to an extent, areas away from agglomerations. However, the reference to cyclic city development models represents only one element of the debate. In their review of the literature, Glatter and Siedhoff (2008) differentiate between seven conceptualisations of reurbanisation: (1) the regrowth of the population and number of employees in a core city, (2) the relative or absolute increase in importance of the core city compared to its surrounding areas, (3) the return migration to the core city of households in the suburban area, (4) the population growth of inner-city neighbourhoods, (5) a qualitative increase in the importance of the core city as a whole, (6) building densification processes in inner-city areas, and, finally, (7) planned strategies to revitalise or generate value in the city or certain urban areas. As a whole, the term and concept of reurbanisation must be deemed 'vague' (Glatter/Siedhoff 2008: 302) and ambiguous against this background. Estimates of real developmental trends in urban regions in relation to the existence of reurbanisation and the role of regional and local strategies strongly depend on whether it is based on a quantitative or qualitative, or an analytic-empirical or normative understanding of the term.

## 2 Reurbanisation as an urban development process – empirical findings

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In the 1970s, many West German metropolitan areas as a whole, and especially their core areas, experienced a decline in population and jobs, both relatively and (frequently) absolutely compared to other areas. The urbanisation process, which was considerably fuelled by the ‘rural exodus’, appeared to have come to an end. For the first time since the onset of industrialisation, ▷ *Rural areas* benefitted from migration from the more densely populated regions. Suburbanisation in relation to both homes and jobs, which increasingly expanded into the surrounding areas, was an expression of the changing location needs of companies and private households; it was propelled by the increase in household income; the increasing motorisation of the population; the principle of home ownership as the ideal for families; attitudes on the part of the social elite that were rather sceptical towards big cities; and tax, subsidy, and developmental policies of the state that promoted deconcentration. Many core cities suffered a significant decline in population and jobs, especially in the 1970s. At that time, the phenomena which precipitated the crises in the large cities were ominously compressed, and, in light of the loss of the industrial basis for those cities, their archaic buildings and infrastructure, social problems and vanishing fiscal resources, the outlook for the future appeared more than uncertain.

The 1980s, however, saw the first indications that this phase might be only an interim episode in the ongoing process of spatial and structural change. The central trigger for the German debate on reurbanisation was the empirical confirmation that the process of suburbanisation had clearly been weakening since the end of the 1990s. After years of population losses, in which inter- and intraregional losses owing to migration and surplus deaths over births accumulated, the residential population in numerous German core cities and the central areas within them recovered (Geppert/Gornig 2010; Sturm/Meyer 2008). Although these were initially only small shifts, they marked a significant change of direction compared to the 1990s.

Previous analyses of reurbanisation in German cities based on social statistics have consistently shown that 18 to 29-year-olds, students, apprentices, and young professionals make up the majority of those who come into cities from non-urban areas and especially move into the inner cities and drive population growth. This also mitigates the aging of the population in core cities.

On the one hand, the analyses decisively confirm a high continuity in the demographic profile of the migration influx and the motives for that influx: those of young people choosing where to live primarily on the basis of job and training opportunities. Furthermore, it is the younger family households (aged 30 to 44) which migrate from the ▷ *Inner city* to the outskirts of the city or the surrounding areas, while the majority of older households (those over 65) have been shown to remain loyal to their place of residence.

On the other hand, overall net migration reveals a reversal of familiar spatial patterns in recent years. In most urban regions, the surrounding areas lose out in absolute or relative terms compared to the core city, and primarily to the inner city. This is attributed to the metropolitan-oriented migration behaviour of groups with a high affinity for urban locations (students, young professionals, childless couples on good incomes, households with unconventional living

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arrangements, and international immigrants) and to a declining migration of family households to surrounding areas.

Furthermore, the analysis indicates that the reurbanisation profile varies from city to city ▷ *City, town* and that a few groupings stand out. One group comprises the large East German cities with their unpressured housing markets, which succeed in keeping families in the city. Cities such as Jena, Weimar, Erfurt, Leipzig and Dresden (Haase/Herfert/Kabisch et al. 2010; Herfert/Osterhage 2012) currently come closest to the understanding of reurbanisation in the logic of the model of cyclic urban development trajectories suggested by van den Berg, Drewett, Klaasen et al. (1982). Another group appears to be smaller cities that have large universities and are characterised by educational migrants, like Freiburg or Heidelberg (Glatter/Hackenberg/Wolff 2014). Economically successful cities such as Hamburg, Munich, and Frankfurt can be considered a third group.

Within the inner city, the individual urban boroughs contribute in varying degrees to the intake of newcomers there (Kabisch/Steinführer/Haase 2012: 122 et seq.). To that end, the position of existing housing in the regional ▷ *Housing market* and the spatial potential for new housebuilding and subsequent densification are significant. In places where the structural change allows for the new construction of larger residential complexes and new residential neighbourhoods on centrally located brownfield sites previously occupied by industrial, military, or transport facilities, this has strengthened the inner city as a residential location. In contrast, the available housing in the already densely overdeveloped inner-city neighbourhoods can be quantitatively expanded only to a moderate extent through further densification, but is adapted qualitatively to new demand groups. It is also the case that the residential population in some inner-city neighbourhoods has grown in recent years without a corresponding increase in the quantity of housing. Relocation flows, which were partly reinforced by a surplus of births over deaths, led to a change in housing occupancy, which in turn led to increasingly dense occupancy patterns of the existing housing.

The broadly diversified social basis for reurbanisation is also reflected in a socio-spatial differentiation at the neighbourhood level (▷ *Neighbourhood/neighbourhood development*). Depending on the location and built structure, inner-city neighbourhoods are being upgraded in various ways and to varying extents. For the central areas, the newly constructed neighbourhoods on inner-city brownfield sites play a key role. Their often exclusive housing, which is aimed at the modern 'urbanite' and the 'creative' and has no problem attracting solvent buyers and tenants (often for secondary or company housing as well), is an especially clear, visible indication of the revaluation of inner-city ▷ *Housing* by social classes with a high income. In other neighbourhoods, reurbanisation is nothing more than classic ▷ *Gentrification*. In addition to modernising the building stock, which, however, is not usually accompanied by an increasing population, forms of 'displacing densification' in existing residential areas have become more frequent in recent years. Finally, reurbanisation can also signify the social and economic stabilisation of 'urban villages' of ethnic groups through migrants moving into the big cities (▷ *Migration*). As a whole, the empirical basis for describing and explaining the development paths of urban subspaces and the associated socio-spatial differentiation is still rather weak.

### 3 Causes

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Although the evidence for the breaks in the demographic development of core cities observed in many Western industrialised nations is largely acknowledged, its causes are disputed. Notwithstanding the controversies among experts and national differences, however, there is a far-reaching consensus that the current, mostly positive population development of big cities is the (interim) result of a highly complex socioeconomic restructuring process of regions characterised by large cities. Arguments based on settlement structure, culture, socioeconomics, city policy, and urban design are intertwined in this debate, whereby empirical evidence, justified expectations and normative catalysts are difficult to disentangle. In this context, multiple constellations of causes come into play that are briefly outlined in the following.

An initial –and common – approach tries to explain reurbanisation in the transition from Fordist to post-Fordist capitalist accumulation regimes, which are characterised (among other things) by strongly individualised consumer needs and flexible production methods and labour markets. Although suburbanisation was a characteristic manifestation of Fordism, reurbanisation can be considered a response to post-Fordist capitalism in terms of settlement structure and space (Grove/Münter 2010; Läßle 2006). There is speculation in relation to the changes in the housing preferences of such groups, which have previously preferred residential locations in the suburbs (Brühl/Echter/Frölich von Bodelschwingh et al. 2005; Siebel 2008; Frank 2013; Häußermann 2009; Glasze/Graze 2007). This especially applies to the young family households, for which the former housing model of the detached house on the peripheries has become less attractive for many reasons. Changes in the working world and gender relationships are seen as decisive factors. Longer working times and irregular working rhythms for highly qualified workers would necessitate a more flexible approach to organising day-to-day life. The close interweaving of professional, social, and private life would increasingly push back the separation between work, free time, and housing that is characteristic of Fordist economic and social forms (Läßle 2006). Everyday life in suburban locations, with longer routes and high levels of commuter stress, puts households under increasing pressure to adapt. In contrast, large cities would offer locations that can accommodate the changed preferences of the workforce in terms of how they use their time. Against this background, in this view it is not only highly qualified employees who prefer urban housing that offers centrality and minimal access costs to metropolitan infrastructure and cultural institutions –

families often do as well. For example, Frank (2013) sees inner city areas as increasingly attractive for family households, which is expressed in changing migration patterns and can be described as an ‘inner suburbanisation’ (Frank 2013: 74). This sometimes leads to ‘family enclaves’ realised through new housebuilding in locations near the city centre, which Frank deems ‘functional equivalents to the Fordist suburban settlements’. According to Frank, this causes a ‘reconfiguration of the inner cities for the needs of the new middle class’ (Frank 2013: 75) and a social tendency towards separation and isolation, including in terms of construction.

A second approach, and one which is emphasised in the German debate on reurbanisation, focuses on demographic factors. To that end, one group plays a central role that is always responsible for a large part of the migration to cities’ cores: young people who move into large cities and university cities to get an education. It is undisputed that the migration gains for core

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cities in recent years have been based on age; the migration is generated to a large extent by young people migrating to get an education and workers between 18 and 30, according to the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (*Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung, BBSR*) (BBSR 2012). This fed speculation that reurbanisation processes are caused by a relatively strongly represented cohort of young people who are just 'passing through' the city, and could therefore be only temporary (Growe/Münter 2010; Hirschle/Schürt 2008). The effects this cohort have on reurbanisation are reinforced by the 'academisation' of education, with a growing percentage of students within this age group, and by short-term special effects, such as the elimination of the general compulsory military service. Therefore, current demographic trends should supposedly not be interpreted prematurely as a trend reversal in migration behaviour (Hirschle/Schürt 2008; Gatzweiler/Kuhlmann/Meyer et al. 2006).

A second group relevant in this context is international migrants. Clearly, large cities are traditionally the preferred destination of people immigrating from foreign countries. The population development in big cities will continue to be largely determined by external migration in future (Bucher/Schlömer 2003). The key reasons for this are the more affordable rental housing available in cities, an attractive  $\triangleright$  *Labour market* even for less qualified people, and existing networks of migrants of various ethnic backgrounds ( $\triangleright$  *Networks, social and organisational*).

However, several studies – primarily in a North American context – also indicate a growing tendency towards suburbanisation on the part of migrants. According to those studies, the core cities have not lost their traditional function as 'gateways' for people of foreign origin, but this factor is now probably less important (see e.g. Farrell 2016 with further evidence). It is conceivable that this is also an effect of the economic upscaling of certain (inner-city) neighbourhoods that functioned earlier as a place of influx for migrants after their arrival.

Demographically centred explanations for reurbanisation, however, make their argument not only with age-related structural effects and the dynamics of international migration. In a second demographic transition, according to that argument, there has been an intense differentiation between types of households and lifestyles, seen especially in an erosion of the family and the greater importance of smaller households (Kabisch/Steinführer/Haase 2012; Buzar/Ogden/Hall et al. 2007; Ogden/Hall 2000). To that end, it is assumed that certain population groups gaining in quantitative significance, such as childless households, empty nesters or single parents, tend to prefer central housing (Häußermann 2009; Siebel 2008; Glasze/Graze 2007). Consequently, changes in the absolute size of those groups influence the dynamics of the population development of the core and inner cities.

One particular group that, as a result of changing housing preferences, is deemed to have a considerable and increasing potential to influence reurbanisation, is the 'young old people', or empty nesters (Brühl/Echter/Frölich von Bodelschwingh et al. 2005: 9 et seq.). However, the widespread assumption that this group would give up their detached homes in the city environs built when they were starting a family to return to the city has thus far left no noteworthy traces in migration statistics (Glasze/Graze 2007: 467 et seq.).

An additional explanation that breaks away from the lines of argument presented above places the process of generating value for inner-city residential areas in the context of the unfolding  $\triangleright$  *Knowledge society*. According to this view, reurbanisation is seen in an overarching perspective as the echo of the transition from the service to the knowledge society in settlement structure.

Big cities with considerable human capital and a large number of knowledge-based sectors are deemed the ‘central stages’ of this development (Läpple 2006), while big cities with old industrial heritage lag behind in their development. The dynamic expansion of such sectors, namely the ▷ *Creative sector and cultural sector*, which is closely related with the rapid development of ▷ *Information and communication technology*, is referenced here. The young, well educated protagonists of this industry prefer not only urban milieus (▷ *Milieu*) as residential and work locations, they depend on the central location for their success, due to the networking density that is only available there. In big cities, fashionable neighbourhoods arise in which those groups are concentrated and create supply infrastructures (gastronomy, leisure and cultural institutions) based on their needs.

The economic approaches to explaining reurbanisation – likewise indebted to regulation theory – include those that refer to the new role of the financial sector in the internationalisation of the property markets and investment flows in metropolises worldwide (Krätke 2014). They claim that the financial sector no longer plays a merely subordinate role, but exercises increasing economic dominance, which is reflected in the metropolises in an increasingly speculative and global trade in property investments. The volumes of disposable capital that are constantly increasing through financial transactions seek profitable and safe forms of investments, which are primarily seen as being in urban real estate. Since the flow of capital into the metropolitan ▷ *Real estate sector* is expected to increase even further, according to Krätke, the pressure for economic exploitation placed on certain urban spaces will intensify (Krätke 2014: 1667). Therefore, the increase in investment activity in the central locations of the metropolises is regarded as independent from the development of demand in the regional housing markets. Instead, these financial strategies of a supraregional real estate sector aim to reconfigure certain urban spaces for the needs of transnational corporations and wealthy households, which drives social ▷ *Segregation* in the cities and agglomeration areas (▷ *Agglomeration, agglomeration areas*). The result is a socially fragmented city characterised by a strong tendency towards the formation of social enclaves (Holm 2012).

Besides economic, demographic, and sociocultural trends, another cause of reurbanisation is city policies, whereby a distinction can be drawn between indirectly and directly effective strategies. Indirect strategies which laid the groundwork for reurbanisation include the urban development strategies presently pursued mostly in big cities, which are committed to the guiding principle of sustainable urban development (‘urban, compact, green’; ‘inner development before outer development’; ▷ *Guiding principles for urban development*). But the strategies that big cities pursue in striving for global visibility are also considered to promote reurbanisation tendencies. By aiming to present and structurally upgrade their city centres as ‘presentation platforms’ (Gerhard 2012: 63), big cities would seek to prevail as attractive locations in the global competition of the metropolises (▷ *Locational policy*). The clearest outward sign of this development can be seen in the redevelopment of urban structures in large, prestigious projects. In this context, the locational needs of certain (‘creative’) groups of workers is once more given particular importance for urban development. It is the members of the ‘creative class’ who are supposedly the target demographic of the ‘upgraded inner-city neighbourhood’ (Gerhard 2012: 63). If a city is to become more competitive, it is deemed essential to attract the well-educated, skilled workers of the global service and creative sector.



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A primary, direct catalyst for reurbanisation is the large-scale inner-city urban redevelopment projects with a high percentage of housing, which have been realised across Europe on former industrial, railway, and military brownfield sites since the 1990s (▷ *Urban redevelopment*). This has led to an (occasionally drastic) increase in the housing stock in central locations. The subsidy policy of the Federal Government and federal states, which is pursued mainly in Germany, and which differs in this respect, e.g. from policies in the USA, acts as a catalyst for this process. Accordingly, the process of reurbanisation in Germany differs from the processes that have been seen hitherto in countries such as the US or the United Kingdom in that the starting level is not really comparable. The depletion of inner cities has never reached the level in Germany that it has in many cities in North America and the UK, also due to the urban renewal policies (▷ *Urban regeneration*) pursued in Germany since the 1970s (Holl/Jessen 2007).

A number of case studies on reurbanisation have thoroughly addressed the question of the role of urban policies and ▷ *Urban planning* (numerous case studies on the development, politics, and effects of reurbanisation in Germany can be found in Hirschle/Sigismund 2008, Dittrich-Wesbuer/Knapp/Osterhage 2010 and in Brake/Herfert 2012). The studies all come to the conclusion that, notwithstanding the variations in the range of policies, in the spatial dimensions of the interventions, and in the instruments used, an urban policy was pursued in each place that strengthened and often deliberately promoted the reurbanisation process. While the strategies of big cities located in stagnating or shrinking regions (Leipzig, Dortmund) can be described as success stories, the problematic social impacts of the strategies of economically prospering cities such as Hamburg and Munich, especially for the lower segment of the housing market, are emphasised. There, the social downsides of reurbanisation have become clear: the growing pressure on the affordable, unmodernised housing of the stock inner cities, generally increasing rents, and the inevitable associated changes in the social structure of inner-city neighbourhoods (Holm 2012). In many large cities, this has led to fierce conflicts, above all in the neighbourhoods particularly affected by gentrification. Against this background, large cities such as Hamburg, Munich and Berlin have developed programmes to incentivise housebuilding, strategies for securing affordable residential space, and housing subsidy programmes for groups with select needs to alleviate the problematic social consequences of reurbanisation.

## 4 Concluding remarks

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In many European metropolitan regions, a weakening of the suburbanisation process has been observed in the past 20 years – a trend that has strengthened considerably in Germany since the mid-2000s and has even led to a tendency towards concentration in many locations. It is now largely undisputed that this process represents a significant break from the trend compared to earlier patterns of inter- and intra-regional development of the population and jobs. Whether this development will prove to be stable remains to be seen. Against this theory of reurbanisation as a new structurally determinant phase of German urban development, it is argued that the population increase is essentially based on people migrating for educational and professional purposes whose cohort size will clearly decline in coming years as an unavoidable consequence of demographic change (▷ *Demographic change*). In this view, reurbanisation is merely a temporary phenomenon that will reach its natural end very soon.

This is countered by weighty arguments that see economic and social change as the background to the changed location preferences of various population groups and the investment strategies of stakeholders in the real estate sector. A conclusive assessment is complicated by the fact that the causes and effects of reurbanisation phenomena are still poorly understood. It also remains to be seen whether the large cities can achieve sustainable urban development that can adequately satisfy the obvious demand for urban housing and make living in the city possible for everyone.

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