

**(Emerging?) topics in resilience  
research perspectives from a critical urban and regional  
studies view**

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# Starting point

## ■ research focus

- urban decline as typical problem of old industrial and post-socialist regions
- urban shrinkage in East Germany in the 1990s:  
suburbanisation, emigration, decreasing birth rates  
BUT shrinkage is more than demographic decline
- growing disparities in Europe, uneven spatial and economic development at various scales → (regional) polarisation and peripheralisation

## ■ research interest

- better understand urban and regional change and actors' attempts to promote/ facilitate change

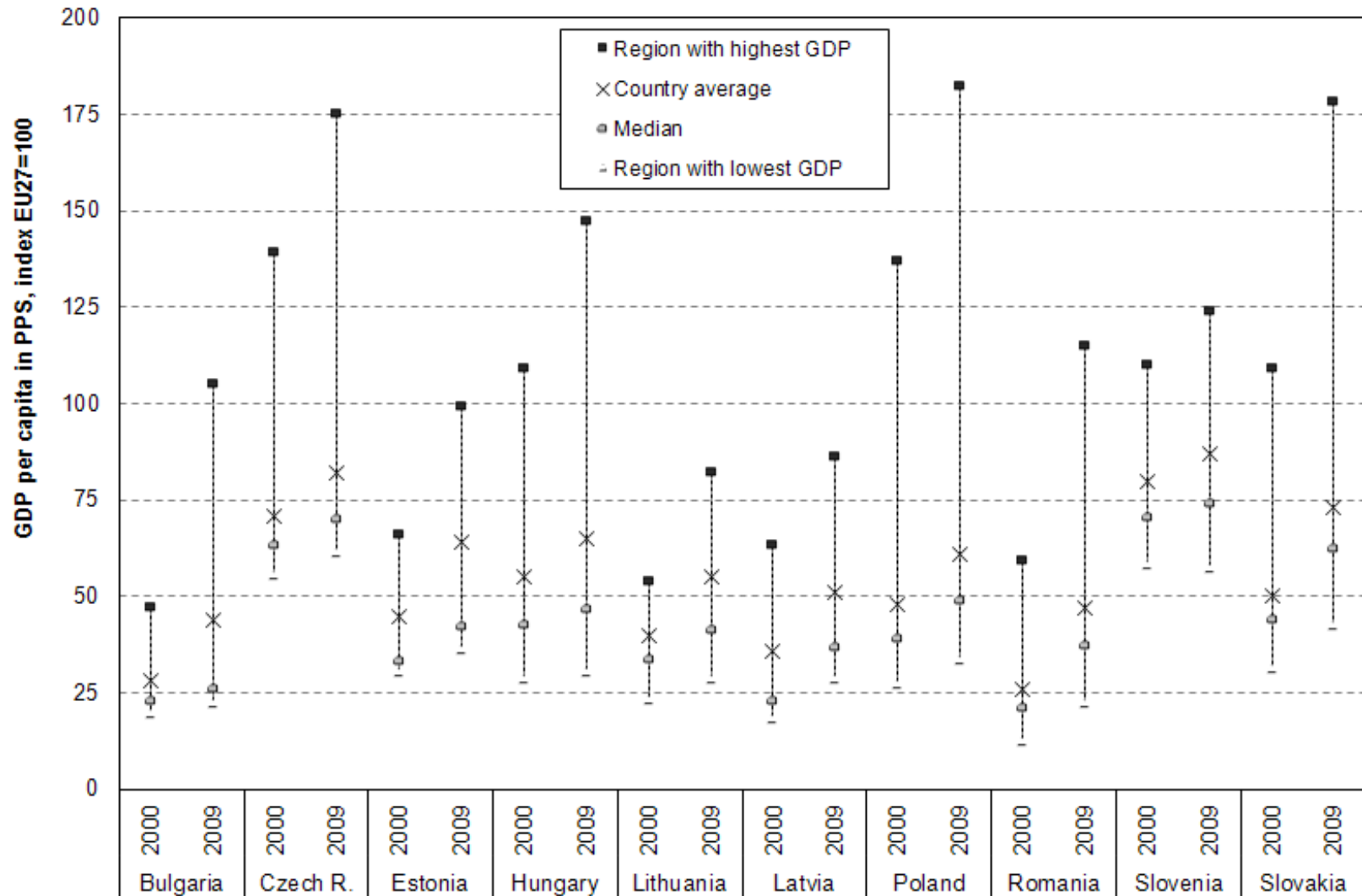
## ■ why care?

- variegated impacts of decline affecting the quality of life and issues of spatial justice
- inequalities matter (infrastructure costs, social costs etc.)!
- policy frameworks for balanced spatial development (EU: Territorial Agenda; Germany: „gleichwertige Lebensverhältnisse“)

## ➤ resilience as a (normative/ political) means to achieve change?

# Growing disparities in CEE

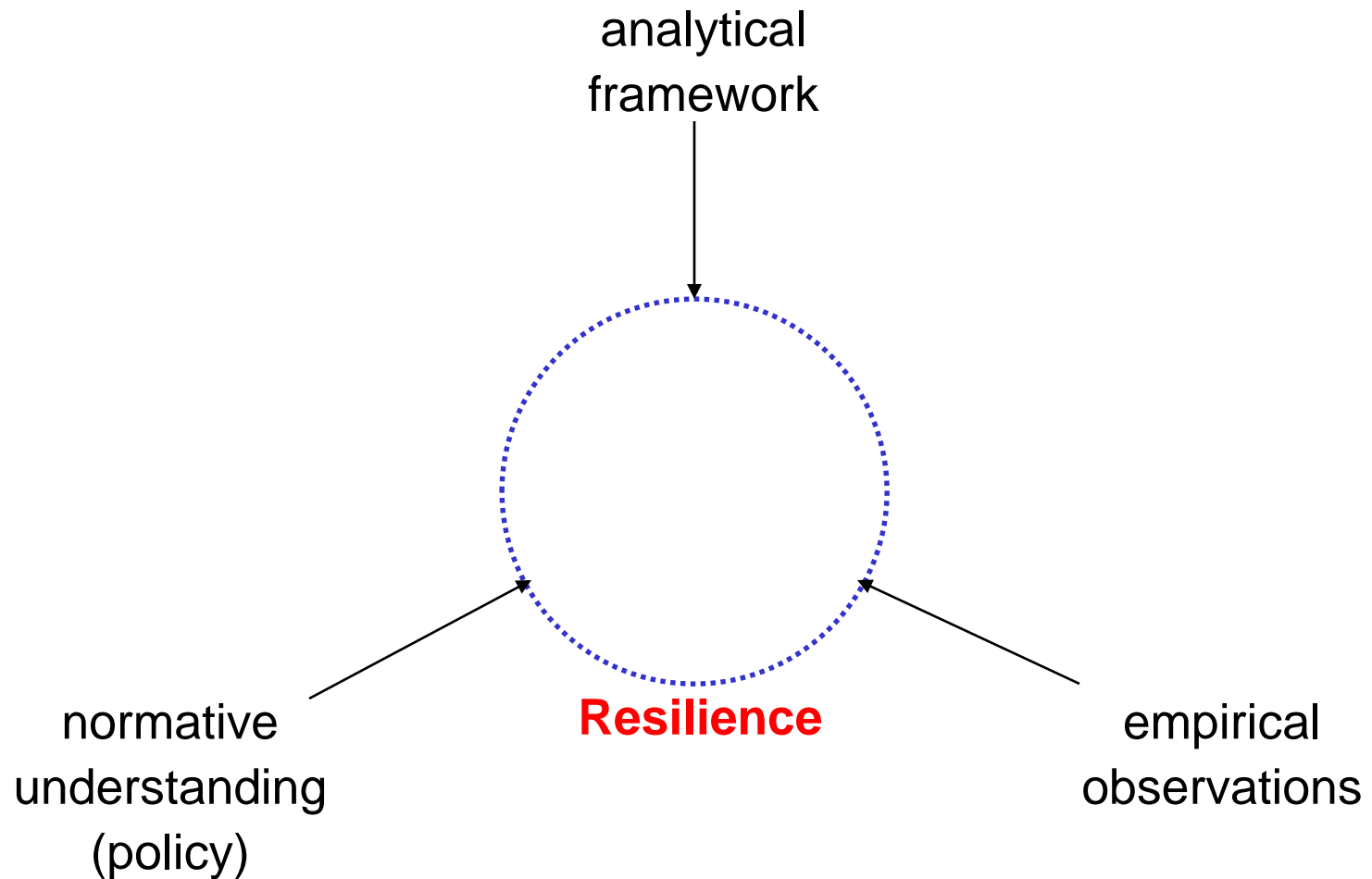
GDP per capita in CEE countries 2000 and 2009, NUTS level 3



# Urban and regional decline as crisis as a form of shock/ disrupture?

- social and economic development:
    - uneven distribution of population losses
    - uneven distribution of jobs and wealth
    - concentration of economic activity in/around Capital and Global Cities
  - globalisation, European integration and national policies:
    - Location patterns of the globalised economy/ plant closures
    - Wider discourse favouring global and big metropolitan city-regions
    - (tendency towards neo-liberal) policy agendas and regional policy
  - from decline to crisis
    - matter of discourse; no ‚objective‘ measurement for crisis
    - factors can be interpreted differently and can change over time!
- 
- How can cities and regions respond to such forms of crises?
  - Resilience policies as a solution to ‚be prepared‘ / ‚to adapt‘ / to transform?

# Urban resilience – theoretical dimensions



# Resilience as empirical perspective

## ■ Resilience and Crisis

- Resilience linked to an attempt to explain variation in response to crisis and recovery after crisis
- resilience as a property explaining prompt recovery after crisis
- more general: why do some cities/regions perform better than others under similar framework conditions

## ■ Studying urban resilience

- problematic selection of indicators
- including questions of long term social stability vs. economic performance?
- easy to identify variation, difficult to understand variation
- study institutions maintaining long-term economic growth and recognizing the industry/firm dimension AND/ OR
- role of governance?

# Resilience as analytical perspective

- defining resilience
  - system thinking: resilience as property of the system
  - linked to forms of adaptation to changing conditions
- ‚properties‘ of resilient systems
  - allow for (Schumpeterian) tests of novel combinations triggering innovation and change because costs of failure are low
  - complex, adaptive and self-organised
  - interlinked in never-ending adaptive cycles of growth, accumulation, restructuring and renewal (Holling 2001)
- application to urban and regional studies
  - understanding urban and regional change?
  - difficult without linking it to other approaches (governance, new institutionalism, ...)
  - definition of the system?
  - relation between adaptation and (intentional) actions?
  - traveling problem/ methodological nationalism

# Resilience as a normative concept

- mission: promote resilience as a response to crisis?
  - overcoming ‘out-dated’ economic structures and re-building economic base, finding new place in the world economy?
  - re-defining national order?
  - avoiding/ overcoming lock-ins, developing new visions with old people?
  - being open for innovation and agents of change?
  - opposing negative images of declining cities and regions?
  - breaking vicious cycles of decline?
  - ...?
- Challenges
  - definition of the achievable state (who defines what for what?)
  - negotiating conflicting normative positions
  - promoting resilience as a long-term strategy to shape the institutional conditions for adaptation while being a matter of perception and normatively charged
- researching the political use of the concept?



# (other) limits of the resilience approach

## ■ Adaptive cycles

- are portrayed as being nested and complex, supporting the emergence of new structures and behaviours
- do not give an idea of HOW this might work
- do not conceptualise the role of agency within the system perspective (is there any?)

## ■ System perspective

- definition of the system?
- could shift focus to the (social, economic, political) institutions conditioning the long-term structures of macroeconomic relationships
- EXCLUDES more radical forms of response and opposition challenging the (capitalist) system
- INSTEAD often leads to a container approach seeking the reasons for failure and vulnerability at the urban level

# The (underestimated) role of context

- places embedded in global (economic) systems
  - but not as victims of global developments
- European frameworks
  - role of cohesion policy and national ‚translation‘
  - focussed vs. distributive regional policies
- national interventions
  - (sectoral, specialised, competitive) national funding schemes
  - setting up new agencies and task forces - supra-local actors in local governance
  - policy orientation through national programmes and debates
- role of local governance responding to crisis
  - local governance can at best influence only the local half of the (unequal) relationship between global flows and local conditions (Painter, Goodwin 2000)
  - local room for manoeuvre constrained by institutional environments at multiple scales

# Emerging themes

- research on socio-economic resilience in general
- delimitating empirical, analytical and normative notions
- multi-level approaches to resilience
  - escaping container thinking (leaving the responsibility for achieving resilience at an urban or regional level)
  - acknowledging the role of the national state
  - sensitive to issues of scale
- community-based attempts including opposition/resistance to the system
- linking resilience thinking with institutionalist approaches looking at various forms of agency
- research on the use/ promotion of resilience in policy concepts

# A research framework adding the institutional dimension to resilience thinking

