

Session: Measuring Well-Being in Regions and Cities

Presentation: **The Urban Audit – measuring the quality of life in European cities**

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Introduction

Improving the attractiveness of regions and cities is one of the priorities targeted by the renewed Lisbon strategy and the Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion for 2007-2013. Quality of life is crucial in attracting and retaining a skilled labour force, businesses, students, tourists and most of all residents in a city.

First we will briefly outline what is the Urban Audit, its current state of play and the main plans for the near future concerning the Urban Audit.¹

Then we turn to the analytical part of the presentation, giving some ideas on the measurement of the attractiveness of European cities.

To start with we will describe some population trends experienced in cities across Europe with the help of the Urban Audit data base. These trends will answer the question whether cities in Europe are able to attract and retain residents. Should the "attractiveness of cities" be an issue on the political and research agenda?

In the next section we will present the different possibilities to define attractiveness of cities. We will also review without the intention of being exhaustive the different methodologies used to analyse this phenomena.

In the last section we will assess the current situation in European cities based on indicators included in the Urban Audit.

Preliminary remarks on the Urban Audit

The Urban Audit data collection provides information on the different aspects of the quality of urban life in Europe's cities. It is the result of a joint effort by the participating cities, the Statistical Offices belonging to the European Statistical System

1) It should be noted that the text of this paper is based on texts published in the Eurostat Regional Yearbook 2007 and 2008.

and the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional Policy. The success of this data collection depends on their contributions and continued support.

What makes the Urban Audit unique?

The Urban Audit exercise can now look back over almost a decade of trials, errors, and achievements. Several concepts were tested and large volumes of data were collected during the pilot study in 1999, the first large-scale data collection round of 2003/2004 and the most recent collection round of 2006/2007. The uniqueness of the Urban Audit data set lies in the extent of its three main dimensions: its wide choice of indicators, its large geographical coverage and its decade-long time series.

Wide choice of indicators

More than 300 indicators were defined and calculated, covering most aspects of quality of life, e.g. demography, housing, health, crime, labour market, income disparity, local administration, educational qualifications, environment, climate, travel patterns, information society and cultural infrastructure. These indicators are derived from the 336 variables collected by Eurostat. Data availability differs from domain to domain: in the domain of demography for instance data is available for more than 90% of the cities, while in the domain of the environment data is available for less than half of them.

Large geographical coverage

Following the pilot study of 58 cities, in 2003/2004 the data collection expanded to cover 258 cities. At present the Urban Audit includes 321 cities from the EU-27, 26 Turkish cities, six Norwegian cities and four Swiss cities. Data will be collected from five Croatian cities in the course of 2008.

A city can be designated as an urban settlement (morphological concept) or as a legal entity (administrative concept). The Urban Audit uses this latter concept and delineates the so called "core city" according to political and administrative boundaries. However, economic activity, labour force or air pollution etc. evidently cross the administrative boundaries of a city. To capture information on this extended spatial level, the "larger urban zone" was defined based on commuter flows. The larger urban zone includes the core city and its "commuter belt". Each core city is divided up into sub-city districts. This third spatial level enables information to be collected on disparities within a city. To allow comparative analysis, national-level data has also been compiled.

The selection of Urban Audit cities was based on several criteria. As a general requirement, the cities selected should reflect the geographical cross-section of each country and should comprise approximately 20% of the national population. Consequently, in a few countries some large cities (over 100 000 inhabitants) were not

included in the Urban Audit. To supplement the Urban Audit data collection in this respect, in 2006 a new data collection, the so-called “Large City Audit” was launched. The Large City Audit includes all “non-Urban Audit cities” with more than 100 000 inhabitants in the EU-27. For the over 250 cities in the Large City Audit, a reduced set of 50 variables is collected. The list of participating cities was agreed bilaterally with the Member States

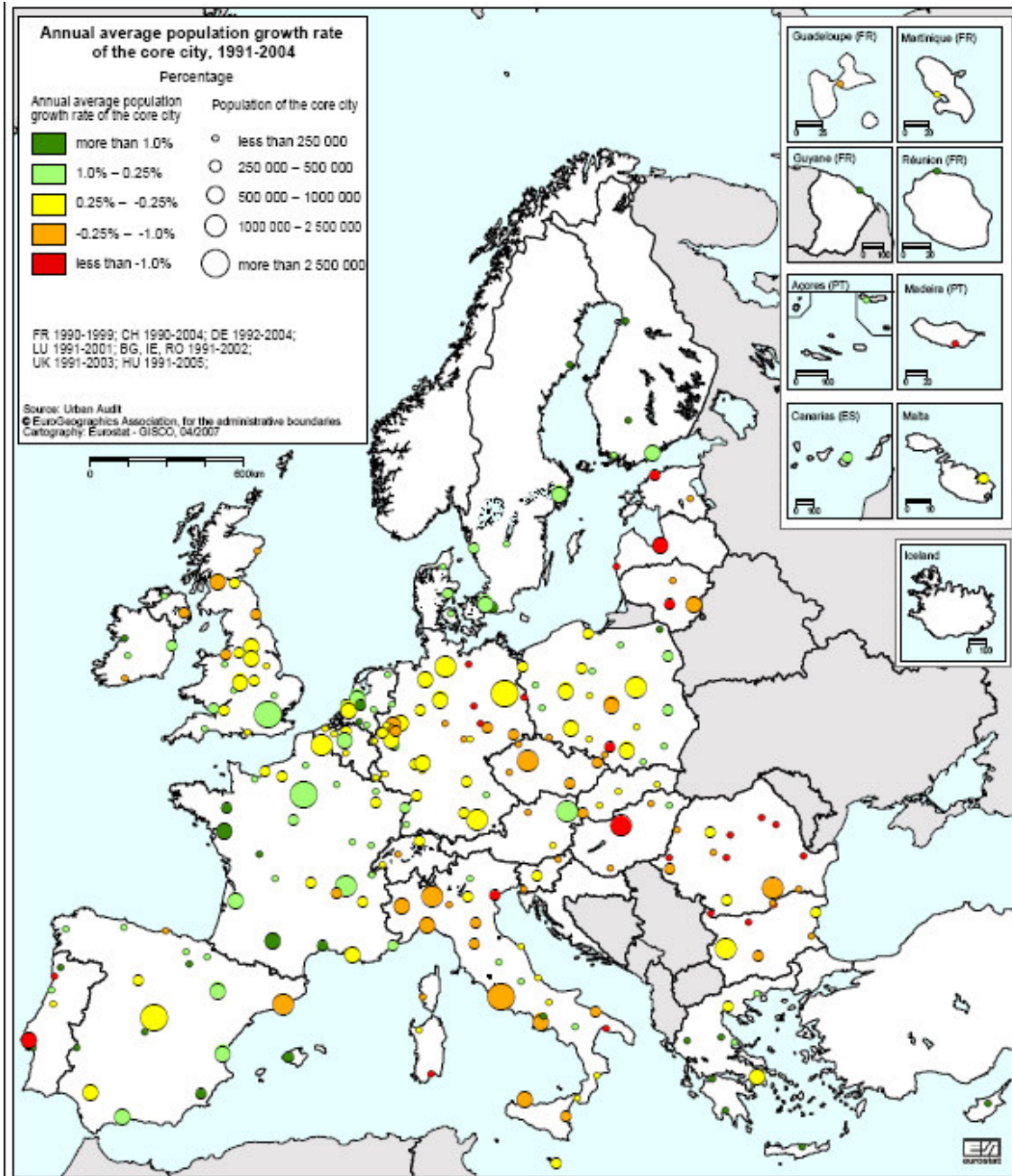
More than a decade-long time series

Four reference periods have been defined so far for the Urban Audit: 1989 to 1993, 1994 to 1998, 1999 to 2002 and 2003 to 2005. Within each period a reference year was set: 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2004. Where possible, cities were asked to provide data for these years. An adjacent year was chosen for variables which were not available for the reference year. For the years 1991 and 1996, data was collected only for a reduced number of 80 variables.

Which European cities are able to attract and retain residents?

Between 1991 and 2004 Europe witnessed major changes. The European integration process intensified, with several barriers to movement disappearing. Several central and eastern European countries radically transformed their political and economic systems and joined the EU in 2004. Which cities grew during these years and which cities declined in terms of population? Map 1 gives the answer to these questions.

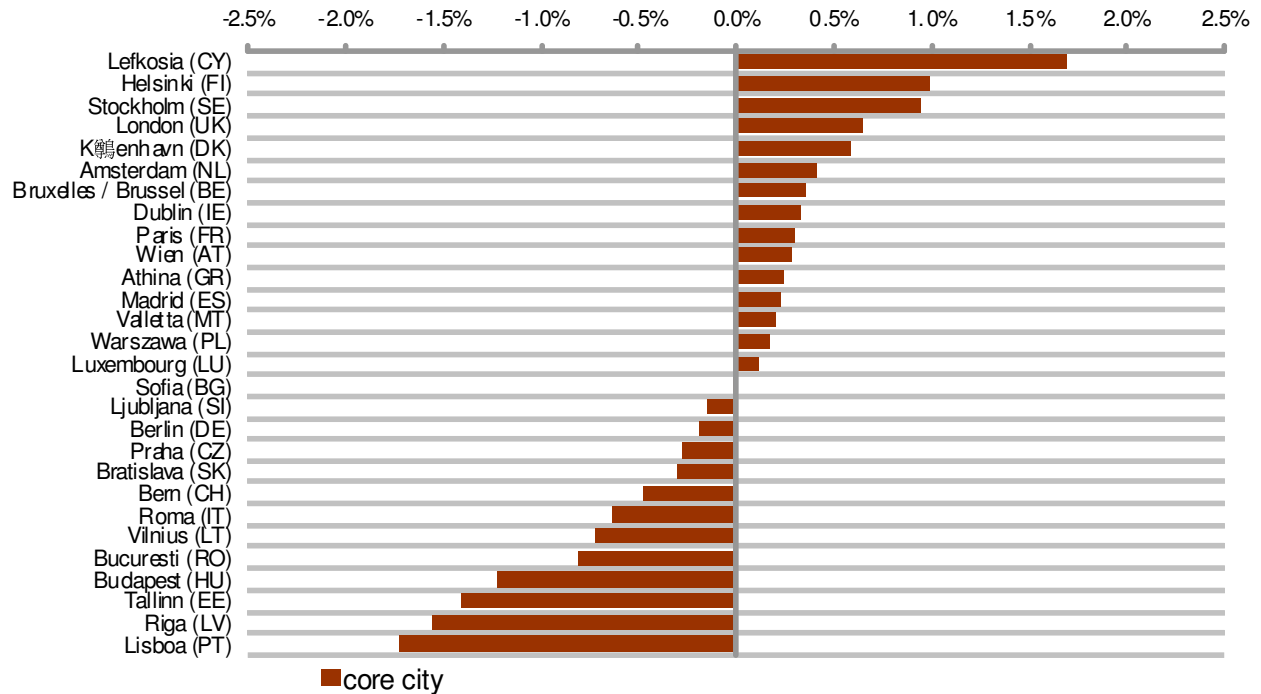
Map 1.



In most cities of the former Soviet bloc, including the cities in East Germany, the population decreased between 1991 and 2004. Except for Poland, where we find a combination of declining, stagnating and growing cities. In these countries, the total population at national level fell as well. Cities with more than 500 000 inhabitants in southern Europe also saw a drop in population, while smaller cities in Greece and Spain grew. The fastest growing cities were in Scandinavia, France and Ireland. We should keep in mind that the data shown refer to the core city, i.e. the population living within the administrative boundaries. In certain cities like Athinaí (EL), Milano (IT), Napoli (IT), Barcelona (ES) or Katowice (PL) the urban built-up area stretches well beyond these boundaries. Among the capital cities, Lefkosia (CY) had the highest growth rate followed by Helsinki (FI) and Stockholm (SE), as shown in Figure 1. London (UK) and Paris (FR) also experienced an increase in population over 1991 to 2004.

Figure 1.

Annual average population change rate (%) in European capitals, 1991-2004



Map 1 and Figure 1 have presented the annual average population growth rates of cities over a period of 15 years. The findings show that several cities in Europe are facing difficulties in retaining residents and attracting people to the city. Why do cities grow or decline in terms of population? The reasons are many. Besides the natural change in population, there are considerable migration flows. Some people move to a place to work: a city with strong skill bases, with positive economic prospects, with employment opportunities. Some move to a place to live: a city with favourable housing, with a safe and clean environment, with an inclusive community. Some move to a place to enjoy: a city with mild weather conditions, with cultural amenities, with recreational areas. In other words, in order to achieve a sustainable growth in terms of population the cities in Europe have to be attractive.

Attractiveness of cities

How do we define attractiveness of cities?

In order to analyse and measure the attractiveness of cities we have to clarify what we mean by this term. Given the ambiguity of the concept we can find several definitions in the urban literature. The different definitions imply the need for different statistical

information to describe this phenomena. Without the intention to give an exhaustive overview of the definitions and methodologies used, we list a few concepts.

This term can be defined from different perspectives. From the perspective of the local government [Andersson 1999] Andersson distinguishes between two alternative definitions. The first is a distributional attractive city, where the city government chooses to make such changes that one group of citizens will win at the expense of another group of citizens. The other definition is a socioeconomically attractive city which is defined as a city where the city government only makes such changes where one group of citizens can win if it is not at the expense of another group of citizens (Pareto sanctioned changes). The objective for the local policy makers is of course to be more attractive according to both definitions of attractiveness. [Turner 2001] To measure the attractiveness of a city according to this definition we would need statistical information on the activities of the local government and the impacts of these activities. What kind of local tax policy does the city implement? What development strategy do they follow in terms of building, infrastructure, etc.

Several organizations define the attractiveness of a city from a perspective of other cities. Using different benchmarking techniques based on the available data they create rankings among a group of cities. A report on Canadian Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) [Conference Board 2007] for example analyzes and benchmarks the features that make Canadian cities attractive to skilled workers and mobile populations. Their starting point is that cities without the ability to attract new people will struggle to stay prosperous in the future. The report uses rankings of outcomes across seven different domains: Economy, Health, Society, Housing, Environment, Innovation, and Education. A similar publication is the Atlas for Municipalities comparing the 50 largest municipalities of the Netherlands on 40 aspects. These include social-economic aspects (like unemployment rate, percentage of highly educated people, poverty rate or use of social benefits, economic structure), indicators on how "appealing" is the city to live in (level of safety, accessibility, culture etc) and indicators on quality of life (housing, sport and recreation, schools, etc). An interesting indicator used was the "powder barrel indicator" to measure the chance of "trouble and danger" in the city.

In 2005 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development hosted a symposium on the attractiveness of cities. [OECD 2005] They defined cities' attractiveness as the ability of a city to attract factors necessary for economic development. They considered attractiveness as an important indicator of a city's potential for future economic success. In this interpretation attractive cities have to maintain and enhance their competitiveness by achieving a flexible, adaptable and diverse local economic structure which would better position them in the global competition. Hence, one of the key elements that determine a city's competitiveness lies in its effectiveness in competing for highly skilled and creative workforce and entrepreneurs, who are the driving force of knowledge-based economies.

Other definitions widen this rather economic concept. [Van den Berg, Van der Meer, Otgaar 2007] Berg et al. for example argues that attractiveness contribute to the

welfare, prosperity and sustainable development of cities. An attractive city should have beyond the economic strength a social and environmental balance.

Assessing the attractiveness of European cities

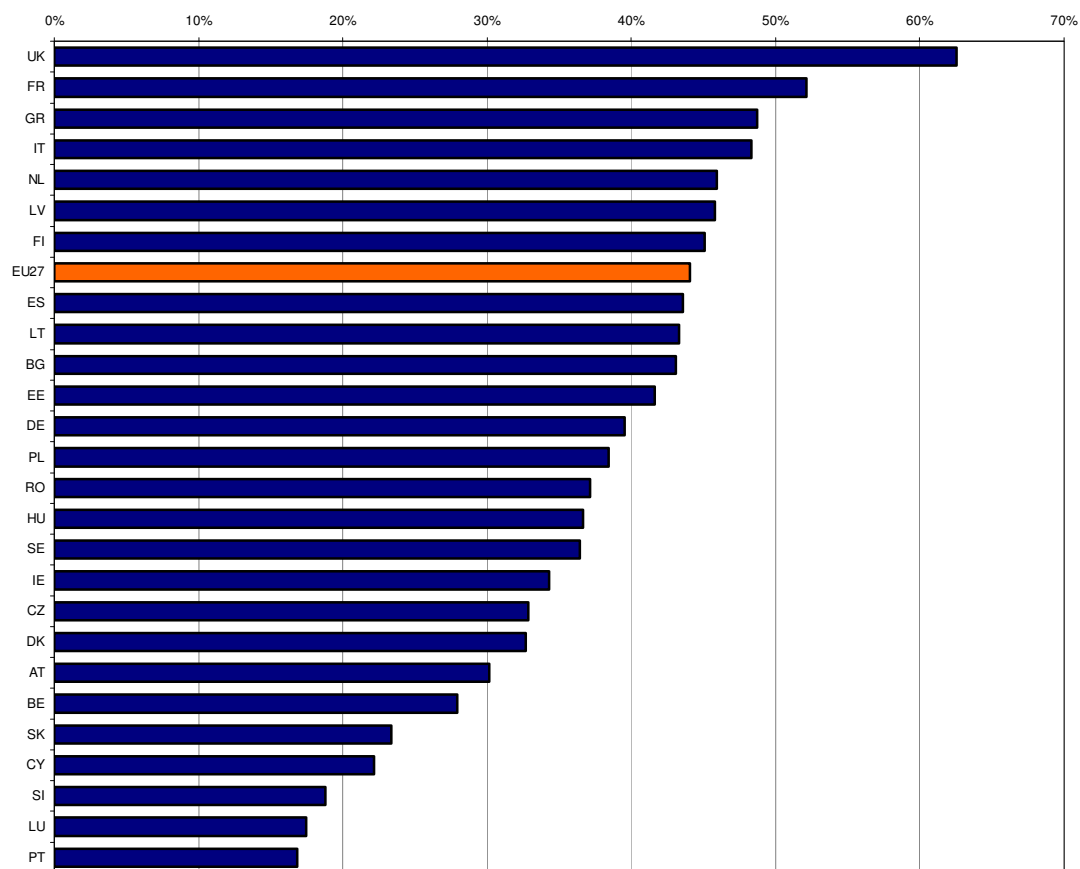
Despite the differences in the above mentioned definitions, we can find indicators which are used in all these concepts to evaluate the attractiveness of a city. In this section we will describe some of these indicators.

The power to attract people has been one of the distinguishing characteristics of cities throughout history. The concentration of people in cities is therefore one of the basic indicators of cities' attractiveness.

Figure 2. illustrates the percentage of national population living in cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. The total population of these cities is more than 210 million, representing approximately 44% of the EU-27 population. In the United Kingdom and in France the proportions of the national population living in cities over 50,000 inhabitants are the highest among all Member States.

Figure 2.

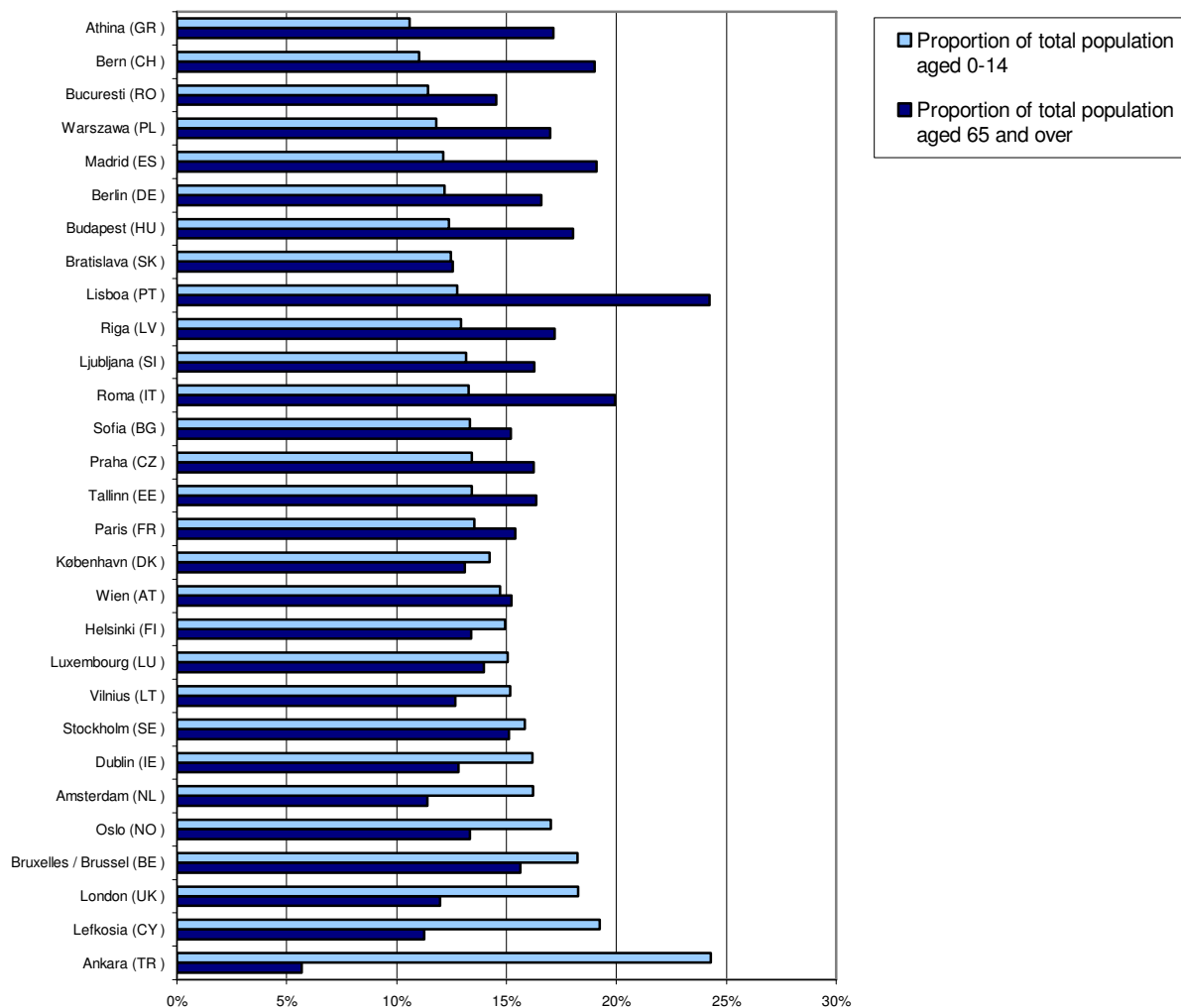
Proportion of population living in cities over 50 000 inhabitants



The size of the urban population in itself reveals only part of the story. Using the Urban Audit database we can examine the age structure of the cities. The share of children less than 14 years old in the total resident population was the highest in Ankara and Lefkosia as shown in Figure 3. Capitals such as London, Bruxelles/Brussel, Oslo, Amsterdam, Dublin and Stockholm also attract young people: the proportion of children less than 14 years old is above 15% there, whereas in Athina, Bern and Bucuresti only one in ten residents is less than 14 years old. The Portuguese capital has the highest share of residents above 65 years old, followed by the other two Southern European capitals, Roma and Madrid. In these cities the share of elderly residents is significantly higher than the share of younger residents, raising concerns about the aging of the population. This process is brought about by low birth rates and/or high life expectancies.

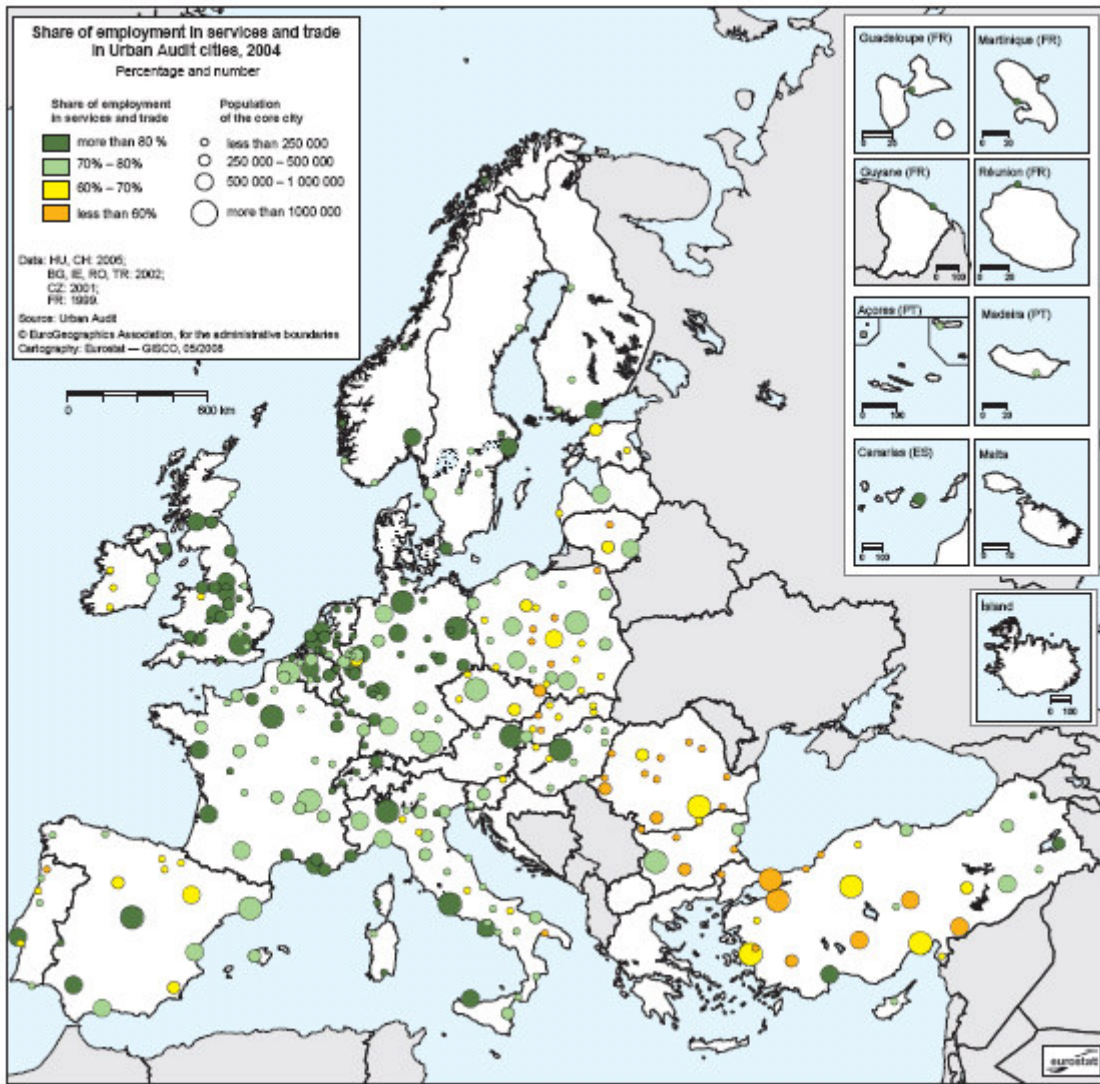
Figure 3.

Proportion of population according to age groups in European capitals, 2004



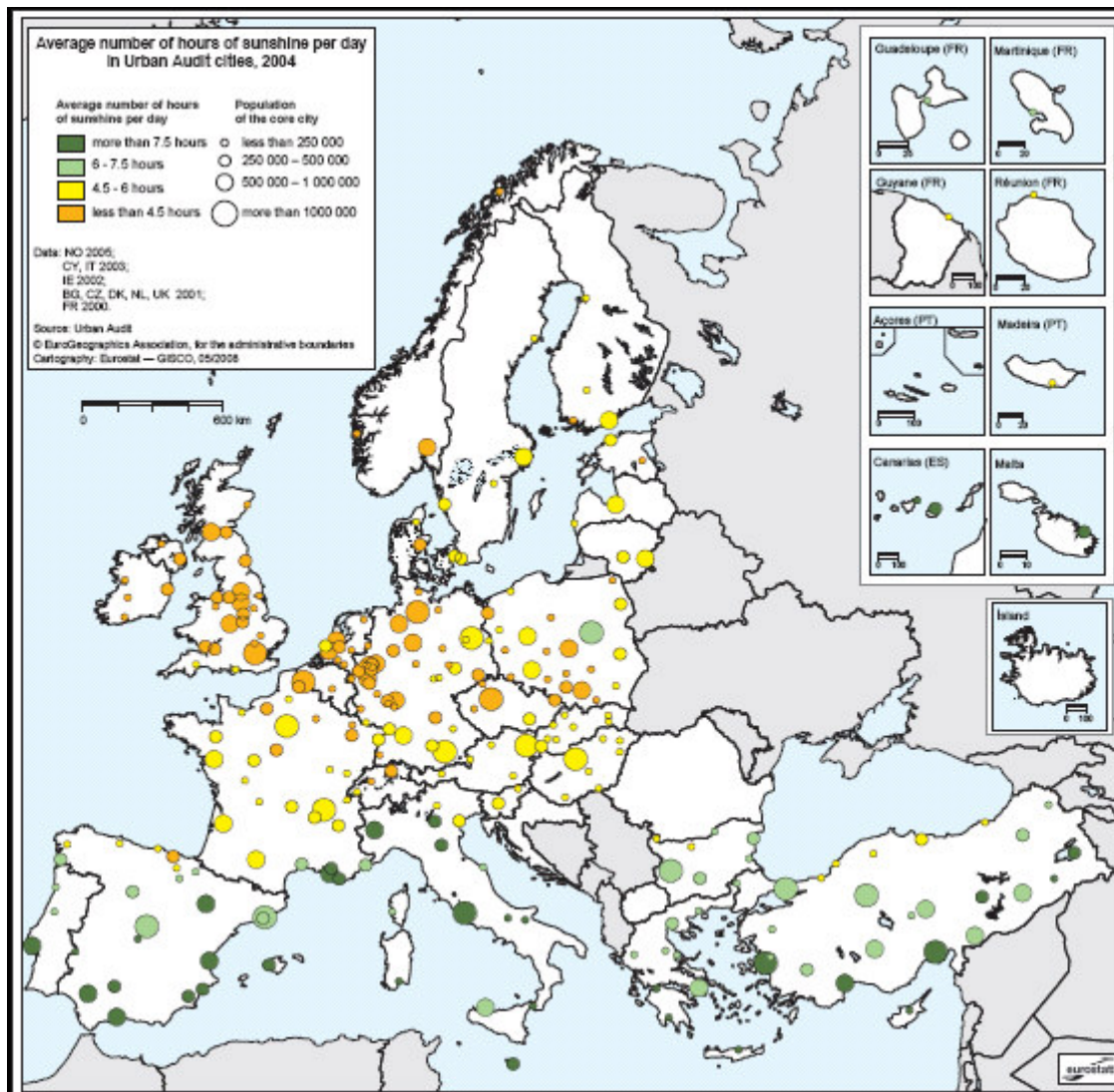
Generally, cities with a concentration of economic activity in the tertiary sector are considered to be more flexible and dynamic, more attractive to those seeking a secure employment base. The highest shares of employment in services, more than 92%, were registered in Cambridge, Luxembourg and Genève. Despite their relatively small population these cities are acknowledged as international centres of research, financial services or administration. Cities where the share of employment in the service sector is 80% or more are mostly located in north-western and northern Europe — see Map 2. Some cities of southern France, Spain and Italy where catering and the tourist trade are dominant also belong to this group. Cities with a high rate of employment in agriculture and industry are notably to be found in the two newest Member States and in Turkey. In 16 out of the 22 cities with more than 1 000 000 inhabitants the share of employment in services is above 70%, while among the cities with less than a 70% share of employment in services 7 out of 10 cities have less than 500 000 inhabitants.

Map 2.



Environmental factors, such as clean air, clear water and friendly weather also influence the attractiveness of a city. Map 3 provides an overview of one of the basic indicators related to the environment: the average number of hours of sunshine per day. The patterns on the map clearly reflect the variety of climates we can experience throughout Europe. In general, northern and north-western Europe has less sunshine; the lowest daily averages were observed in the cities of the Ruhr area. Cities in southern Europe have more than 7.5 hours of sunshine daily. The largest disparities within a country are registered in Spain, between Bilbao and Málaga.

Map 3



Besides the economic dimension, the importance of the social dimension of urban attractiveness has been coming to the fore recently. The image of a “divided city” or an “unsafe city” evidently has detrimental effects on the city’s attractiveness. Therefore, in addition to “hard facts” about social exclusion, disparities or crime the perception of residents is crucial. To find out how citizens feel and think about their city we can turn to the results of the Urban Audit Perception Survey. The last survey took place in 2006 and included 75 major cities in the EU-27, Croatia and Turkey. Survey data were collected through telephone interviews of samples of 500 persons per city. Respondents were asked if they always, sometimes, rarely or never feel safe in the city they live in. In Aalborg (DK), Oulu (FI), Oviedo (ES), Groningen (NL), København (DK), München (DE) and Helsinki (FI) less than 5% of the respondents answered that they never or rarely feel safe in the city. Consequently, more than 95% of the respondents always or most of the time feel safe in the city. Similarly favourable answers were registered in these cities to the question on feeling safe in the neighbourhood. These almost unanimous answers point to the fact that these cities are perceived as safe by the citizens. However, not all cities could be considered safe based on the responses. At the other end of the scale we find Istanbul (TR) and Napoli (IT). In these cities more

than half of the respondents never or rarely feel safe in the city. In striking contrast to these negative results remarkably few respondents, less than 15%, stated in Istanbul that they never or rarely feel safe in the neighbourhood they live in. Large differences between the perceptions of safety in the city in general and in the specific neighbourhood where the respondents live were found in other cities as well, notably in Diyarbakir (TR), Marseille (FR), Antalya (TR) and Praha (CZ). In these cities the safety of the neighbourhood was rated more positively than the overall safety of the city. These discrepancies indicate the existence of social divisions within a city and the potential existence of “crisis districts”.

Conclusion

What makes a city attractive? Residents are attracted to cities with a high quality of life, businesses are attracted to cities with a good skills base and infrastructure, students are attracted to cities with a good university or college, tourists are attracted to cities with cultural values and mild weather, etc. As a result, a city’s attractiveness is determined by a number of factors. In the previous paragraphs we mentioned a few, such as demographic characteristics, economic structure, the environment and social aspects. However, several other elements could be analysed.

We encourage statisticians, researches and policy makers to keep this topic on the agenda and try to find ways to assist cities in their efforts to attract and retain residents.

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