

Socialist and Post-Socialist Urban Transformation in Small Cities of Southeast Europe

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Report by Pieter Troch, Regensburg

□ The central aim of this workshop was to re-focus urban studies of Southeast Europe and beyond to small and medium-sized cities. In his introduction, *Ger Duijzings* (University of Regensburg) highlighted the importance of small and medium-sized cities in the region. Demographically, a large part of the population in Southeast Europe lives in small, shrinking cities. Politically, they provide an important part of the electorate with particular political demands. Theoretically, there is a need to include a view 'from elsewhere' in urban studies, as noted by Jennifer Robinson. Mainstream urban studies are off-key with the situation on the ground in a lot of ordinary cities, which does not fit in nicely with the supposed paradigms set by big cities that dominate the discipline. Small cities' dependence on mono-industrial development, strong collectivism and social control, restricted loci of power, low urban density, and particular modes of transport and communication, according to Duijzings, suggest particular experiences of socialist and post-socialist urbanity in the smaller cities of the region. The workshop in Regensburg brought together eleven papers from different disciplines – including anthropology, geography, history, and sociology – covering a broad spectre of case studies from Southeast Europe. It shifted the debate from the ideological and macro-economic role of urbanisation to everyday practices and transformations in urban environments. There was a particular interest in the material and spatial aspects of urban modernity in the context of socialist and post-socialist transformations.

Session 1: Urbanisation and economic development

Matthias Bickert (Federal Agency for Agriculture and Food) and *Daniel Göler* (University of Bamberg) discussed "History, present and future of communist new towns in Albania between shrinkage and revitalization". Numerous new mining towns had been developed in communist Albania in often unwary and inaccessible locations to step up industrial production. With the beginning of Albania's transition period, however, mining fell close to zero. The main source for work and economic development in mono-structured mining towns disappeared and many of them were more or less abandoned due to extreme rates of out-migration. Nowadays, however, the increasing demand for chromium – Albania's most important export product – and its consequential high price level bring about some informal and professional reactivation of temporarily closed mines. In their paper, Göler and Bickert analysed four case-studies to examine the effects of globalization and path dependency in small Albanian mining towns. They concluded by listing a number of factors shaping the different fates of new mining towns in post-socialist Albania: accessibility and location; quality of resources; dependence on global market; identity and heritage; and diversity of local economy.

Zlatko Jovanović (University of Copenhagen) talked about "Transformation in the urban periphery: The case of Tuzla". His paper explored the urbanisation of peripheral areas of the industrial city of Tuzla in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a focus is on two mining communities in the city's periphery: Lipnica and

Mramor Novi. These two peripheral settlements were built as urban-type neighbourhoods in the 1950s and 1960s adjacent to the original villages. Their architecture is typical of the urban residential architecture of the period. Both settlements had integrated and ethnically mixed populations – a pattern characteristic of the larger cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and rather atypical for the republic's rural areas. However, what distinguished the settlement from Tuzla (and other larger Bosnian cities) was that their population was mostly working-class. A substantial part of Tuzla's working class in fact resided in the city's peripheral settlements and surrounding municipalities. In the 1970s, the development of these peri-urban settlements stalled, due to increased decentralisation, which transferred urbanisation competences to the level of the municipalities with insufficient means for infrastructural development. In addition, there was a shift to consumption-based infrastructure. In the end, these in-between semirural and semi-urban settlements seem blocked in early socialist transformation and lack perspectives or differentiation.

Jasenka Kranjčević (Institute for Tourism, Zagreb) and *Sanja Hajdinjak* (University of Vienna) held a paper on "Tourism urbanisation in socialism and post-socialism in Southeast European cities: Case study analysis of Croatian Poreč and Makarska". The paper compared the role of spatial planning and its influence on tourism-driven urbanisation in the socialist and post-socialist setting on case-studies of Poreč and Makarska, two small tourist cities on the Croatian Adriatic coast. Their argument was that socialism in Yugoslavia ensured humanised urbanism, which favoured hotels and resorts while protecting valuable natural resources. Western spatial planning practices and social planning and ownership led to tourism urbanisation that developed liveable tourism cities and preserved valuable landscapes. In contrast, the Yugoslav wars and the transition to capitalism brought a change in ownership of the resources and investment incentives. Frequent legislative changes adopted without inter-sectoral cooperation, denationalisation, privatisation and a loss of bureaucratic capacity quickly followed. As a result, spatial planning and urbanisation patterns started reflecting short-term interests of the tourism monopoly. In heavy war-affected Makarska, tourism development was particularly aggressive. In Poreč, which suffered less from war, there was more respect for socialist urban planning.

Session 2: Infrastructures

Ana Kladnik (Hannah-Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies at the TU Dresden) discussed "Socialist and Post Socialist Transformation of the Fire Safety Service in Smaller Cities in Slovenia and Vojvodina". She analysed the social role of voluntary fire departments in socialist and post-socialist small cities in (former) Yugoslavia on the example of the case studies of Ptuj in Slovenia and Bačka Topola in Serbia. Her paper showed that voluntary fire departments have been a constant feature of associational life in Central and Southeast European towns under very different political systems. Although communist regimes tended to abolish pre-existing civic associations or bring them under tight control, local voluntary fire departments showed a remarkable degree of resilience and continued to exist and perform their duties throughout the four decades of communist rule in Yugoslavia. They were integrated in local self-management organisations and aligned with the Yugoslav socialist ideology. The turbulent post-socialist transformation did not alter this general picture, although increasing pressure for professionalisation and integration into state administration is obvious.

Mladen Stilinović (Ghent University) held a paper entitled "Behind the fence, a domain: The emergence of former military sites in post-socialist cities (Bitola)". He presented a case study of the military domain in Bitola, a small city in Macedonia with a strong military presence. In the socialist period, the Yugoslav National Army had played an important role in local society and economy and was the main financier of urban development in Bitola. However, the military domain itself remained a secluded area situated at a very attractive spot of the pre-socialist military barracks in the South of the city. The domain was 'invisible'. Not only was it hidden behind a fence, it also did not fall within the urbanist logic of the city, with separate communal networks and residential blocks that were not included in the city's cadastral records. At the same time, it was omnipresent, occupying a large segment of the city and shaping the

expansion of the civil city. In the 1990s, the military domain was abandoned, but it remained an invisible spot in the urban tissue. This large area of state-owned land at an attractive location opened enormous possibilities for neoliberal urban development and is currently transformed through extremely speculative real-estate developments.

Deana Jovanović (Keele University) talked about “Public utilities in an industrial town in Serbia”. The paper ethnographically analysed urban space and temporality in relation to people’s mundane engagements with district heating and greenery in the middle-sized, provincial, copper-processing town of Bor in Eastern Serbia. It analysed the ways in which the urban residents tried to prove the ‘urbanity’ of their town in relation to neighbouring cities in a context of industrial and urban decay. Residents of Bor are particularly keen to prove the urban character of their town by referring to its ‘built’ and planned character. Its enterprise-centric heating system and planned urban space are a legacy of the mono-industrial development of the city. In socio-economic terms, the mono-industrial dependence of the city makes it more vulnerable to post-socialist economic crisis than the neighbouring administrative centre of Zaječar. The potentiality and future-oriented character of the material infrastructure of the socialist city, however, continues to define people’s engagements with the city and define its perceived superiority vis-à-vis Zaječar.

Session 3: Ethnic identity and urban space

Zlatina Bogdanova (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnographic Museum) and *Krasimir Asenov* (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, National Institute of Geophysics, Geodesy and Geography) held a talk on “Urban planning policies and spatial segregation on ethnic grounds: A comparative study of ‘Loznitsa’ neighborhood in Assenovgrad and ‘Arman mahala’ in Plovdiv”. They focussed on Loznitsa, a “ghettoised urban structure” with a majority Roma population in Assenovgrad in Southern Bulgaria. Using the “anthropology at home” method, the paper analysed the spatial and cultural development of Roma neighbourhoods against the context of socialist and postsocialist urban development. Under socialism, both settlements had developed as a result of the sedentarisation policy of the Bulgarian state. Urban planning and socio-spatial characteristics of the urban space had determined the position of Roma ghettoised urban structures.

Arman Mahala on the contrary, is located in an industrialised peripheral area, literally on the other side of the city. Loznitsa was relocated three times to the new peripheries of the expanding city. In the case of Loznitsa, the state was the dominant actor in the settlement of Roma in the ghettoised structure. It did not take into consideration kinship ties, which created tensions within the Roma community in the neighbourhood, and in time spilled over the urban area as a whole. Both settlements expanded and developed horizontally, by informal/illegal occupation of adjacent municipal terrain. In case horizontal expansion had been obstructed, expansion developed vertically. After the collapse of socialist Bulgaria, the higher economic status of Roma (related to emigration) did not lead to the dispersion of the ghettoised urban structure, but to the restructuring of external and internal living space. In addition, Roma who had settled in the “cleaner” city centre moved to the Roma neighbourhoods (so-called auto-segregation). Such trends reflect the growing ethnic distance between Roma and the rest of the population and its spatial reflections.

Pieter Troch (IOS Regensburg) discussed “Socialist urban planning and spatial hierarchies in Mitrovica (Kosovo)”. His paper related the current Serb-Albanian ethno-political division of the city to socio-spatial divisions originating during the socialist transformation of the city. The paper argued that socialist urban transformation led to a dual urban landscape, comprising a comprehensive, enterprise-centric, and compact socialist neighbourhood in the Northern part of the city and a dispersed and fragmentary urban fabric in the South. This spatial division of the socialist city spatialised ethnic divisions by concentrating Serbs and Montenegrins – who were overrepresented among the upper socio-occupational strata of the population – in the Northern part of the city. The paper showed that the smallness of the city was

relevant in two ways: First, the sharp duality that arose in the socialist urban development was due to the contingent reliance on one high-priority enterprise for urban development and abortive impact of market reforms on urban expansion. It was also due to the compressed character and low quality of housing in the pre-socialist city centre, which prevented desegregation of the urban elite, and informal migration patterns, which did not change spatial patterns in the urban landscape (most informal settlement took place in the South of the city). In addition, the smallness and peripheral position of the Mitrovica explain the resilience and endurance of the city's dual built environment.

Session 4: Configurations of public space

Miladina Monova (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge) held a paper on "Household economy in the city: Conflict and negotiations over public space in Prilep, Macedonia". The urban landscape of the city of Prilep in Macedonia illustrates the imbrication between the domestic and the industrial spheres of work. The paper showed how since the breakup of Yugoslavia and the collapse of the socialist regime, domestic economy not only accounts for alternative routes to make a living but also contributes to an alternative vision of urbanity. The urban appearance of the household economy in Prilep questions narrow divisions between public and private, informal and formal, indoor and outdoor which govern the functional understanding of the modern city. Despite appearances, households are powerful economic actors that have been able to appropriate parts of urban space for meeting their own needs. Behind an apparent conflict lays an informal agreement between households struggling to survive and the state's incapacity to reconcile the two supposedly distinct economic spheres of industrial and agricultural work and accompanying understanding of a functional and compact city.

Corneliu Pintilescu (George Barițiu History Institute of the Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca) discussed "Conceiving and living the 'rationalization of space' in the emerging city of Brașov: A case study of 'high modernism' in late socialist Romania". The paper analysed the so-called "urban systematisation" policies of Ceaușescu's regime and its effects on everyday life in the emerging city of Brașov during the 1970s and 80s. It examined how the so-called "rationalisation of space", which emphasised the need to economise space – a key component of urban systematisation in late socialist Romania – affected the urban fabric of Brașov during late socialist and early post-socialist period. Most importantly, it led to urban densification as it halted the geographic dispersion of the city by replacing areas of private dwellings with high-rise socialist neighbourhoods and reconstructing the socialist neighbourhoods of the 1950s. In this process, the policy affected in a contradictory way the everyday life of the population of these neighbourhoods. It entailed both a fall in living standards concerning leisure space and security and a partial increase in the standards of habitation due to the building of a larger number of apartments with three or four rooms.

Tanja Petrović (Institute of Culture and Memory Studies, Ljubljana) presented "A place where Serbia is developing most rapidly: Public space, citizenship and agency in Jagodina (Serbia)". She explored the relationship between reconfiguration of public spaces and regimes of governance since the end of socialism in Jagodina, a middle size industrial town in central Serbia. Unlike most provincial towns, Jagodina experienced extensive building within the last decade, which significantly reconfigured public space and in fact led to a divided city, pitting the new post-2004 modernity against the old "provincial" town of socialist modernity. This division is not geographically organised in a dual structure, but pertains two clusters of new buildings overlapping and demolishing the socialist urban fabric. The paper identified two ways in which public space was reconfigured and perceived by citizens: First, there is no sharing of public space as the city administration manages the public space and the public lives of people. Second, the moral economy in the space-less town is absent. The only way to get things done in the city is to participate.

Concluding Remarks

In the concluding discussions – with contributions by the discussants *Srđan Mandić* (Bauhaus University Weimar), *Ulf Brunnbauer* (IOS Regensburg), *Ger Duijzings* (University of Regensburg), and *Ivan Rajković* (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle) – a number of elements was raised that set urbanity in small towns of Southeast Europe apart. *First*, although less directly involved in global exchange networks and often presented as isolated places, peripheral there cities are not disconnected. Their development and urbanity is indebted to modernist urban planning, migration patterns at various scales, and participation in the global market. In fact, their smallness can only be understood in a relative and comparative way. Small cities occupy a peripheral position in urban networks, in demographic terms, in terms of power relations, but also in terms of professional urbanist capacities.

Second, there are no objective criteria for defining “smallness”. It would be worth to define small cities on the basis of the following relative criteria:

- Distribution of power, ownership and capital – the fewer loci of power, the smaller the city (typically, one industrial enterprise, one source of economic wealth, one political actor ...). The power relations in small cities reflect fuzzy and shifting boundaries between public and private.
 - Particular agency of infrastructure in small cities of Southeast Europe: The inertia and futureoriented quality of the built environment of socialist small cities provide comfort to its inhabitants in times of post-socialist uncertainty. They also substantiate the positive image inhabitants of smaller cities often have of their city in comparison to “inhuman” big cities.
 - Smallness is not a question of population numbers, but of population developments. Small cities face stagnating population numbers, which drastically contrast with their sharp growth under socialism.
 - Small cities are particularly beneficial sites to study the social impact and functioning of socialism, post-socialism and neoliberalism. From a methodological point of view, it pays off to study small cities. Social anthropology clearly has some advantages here, because of its sensitivity and tools for studying particular events in particular (peripheral) settings. History of small cities risks to fall into the trap of local history without any relevance for global history, if it doesn't relate the case study to wider trends and timeframes.
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