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## Introduction: Modernism and the (Post-)Socialist City

MARKUS KIP, WLADIMIR SGIBNEV\*

### Abstract

*“Post-modernism” and “post-socialism” are two frames that have been widely applied to account for urban changes over the past decades. It is a common statement to consider socialist urbanism as the pivotal embodiment of modernist thinking. The transformation to post-socialism consequentially appears as an instance of post-modernization. This overview article challenges such identification, arguing that modernist endeavours and the experience of the modern have been more diverse and complex than such periodization imply. In the present paper, we want to make the distinction between a narrow and broad conception of modernism. In the first part, we begin by discussing the “high modernist” approach, often conflated with modernism in toto. In such a narrow understanding, “modernism” amounts to a particular style in architecture and approach in urban planning and governance. Next, we present a broad conception of modernism as a cultural response to the experience of modernity and the yearning for being modern. We argue for the necessity of addressing the complexity and breadth of modernist visions. In conclusion, we pinpoint the major themes addressed by the contributors to this special issue and highlight how we think this volume contributes to scholarly debates about the merit of revisiting and resurrecting modernist urbanism in twenty-first century post-socialist urban contexts and beyond.*

Post-modernism, post-socialism, transformation, planning in Eastern and Western Europe

### Zusammenfassung

#### **Einführung: Modernismus und die (post)sozialistische Stadt**

*„Postmodernismus“ und „Postsozialismus“ sind zwei Rahmenkonzepte, die häufig verwendet werden, um während der letzten Jahrzehnte aufgetretene städtische Veränderungen zu erklären. Es ist eine weit verbreitete Auffassung, dass das sozialistische Städtewesen als zentrale Verkörperung einer modernistischen Denkweise zu betrachten sei. Die Transformation des Postsozialismus erscheint folgerichtig als Beispiel für Postmodernisierung. Dieser Überblicksartikel hinterfragt eine solche Festlegung und argumentiert, dass modernistische Bestrebungen und die Erfahrungen der Moderne vielfältiger und komplexer waren, als eine solche Periodisierung beinhaltet. In der vorliegenden Arbeit möchten wir zwischen einem enger und einem weiter gefassten Modernismus-Begriff unterscheiden. Im ersten Teil erfolgt eine Diskussion des „hochmodernistischen“ Ansatzes, der häufig mit dem Modernismus als Ganzem in Verbindung gebracht wird. In einem solchen begrenzten Verständnis steht „Modernismus“ für einen besonderen architektonischen Stil und einen entsprechenden Ansatz im Hinblick auf Stadtplanung und städtische Verwaltung. Im Anschluss daran präsentieren wir ein weiter gefasstes Konzept des Modernismus: Modernismus als kulturelle Erwiderung auf die Erfahrungen der Moderne und als Streben danach, modern zu sein. Dabei argumentieren wir, dass es notwendig ist, die Komplexität und die Vielfältigkeit modernistischer Ideen ebenfalls zu thematisieren. Abschließend benennen wir die wichtigsten Themen, die von den beitragenden Autoren hinsichtlich dieser besonderen Fragestellung behandelt werden. Zudem heben wir hervor, warum wir denken, dass dieser Band einen wichtigen Beitrag zur wissenschaftlichen Debatte über den Wert, die städtebauliche Moderne in postsozialistischen urbanen Kontexten des 21. Jahrhunderts und darüber hinaus erneut aufzugreifen und wiederzubeleben, darstellt.*

Postmodernismus, Postsozialismus, Transformation, Planung in Ost- und Westeuropa

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У Корбюзье то общее с Люфтваффе,  
что оба потрудились от души  
над переменной облика Европы.  
Что позабудут в ярости циклопы,  
то трезво завершат карандаши.<sup>1</sup>

*(Joseph Brodsky, excerpt from  
the "Rotterdam diaries", 1973)*

"Post-modernism" and "post-socialism" are two frames that have been widely applied to account for urban changes over the past decades. There is ample literature to explain urban changes, on the one side, as a process of post-modernization, and on the other, as related to a post-socialist transformation in former state socialist countries. To the extent that these literatures overlap, it is a common statement to consider socialist urbanism as the pivotal embodiment of modernist thinking, as evidenced in the book *Seeing Like a State* by James C. SCOTT, professor of Political Science and Anthropology at Yale University (SCOTT 1998). The transformation to post-socialism consequentially appears as an instance of post-modernization. The article "Landscapes of Postmodernity: Changes in the Built Fabric of Belgrade and Sofia Since the End of Socialism" by Sonia HIRT, professor for Urban Affairs and Planning at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (HIRT 2008), is exemplary of this line of thinking. This essay engages with her argument "that postsocialist cities provide highly vivid examples of the rupture between the modern and the postmodern, perhaps as vivid as examples in the so-called Western world" (HIRT 2008, p. 787). In other words, the socialist city was modern, the post-socialist city is post-modern.

This special issue challenges such identification. In this introduction, we lay some groundwork to argue that modernist endeavours and the experience of the modern have been more diverse and complex than such periodizations imply.

The overcoming of socialist urbanization strategies does not necessarily entail a "post-modern" outlook, but can involve alternative articulations of the modern. The contributions explore in greater depth the relationship between socialism and modernism, and how this has changed with "post-socialist" transformation. These papers take case studies in the former Soviet Union, in contemporary Russia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Bulgaria and East Germany. A focus on cities seems useful as loci in which modernist and post-modernist visions were advanced and implemented. The main questions we address are: What role did modernist ideas play in socialist urbanism? And how are the socialist and modernist urban landscapes negotiated today in a post-socialist condition?

In particular, this issue problematizes the equation of modernity and modernist visions with "high-modernist" state-projects that were particularly pronounced in socialist contexts. Although modernism in the post-socialist context is widely associated with vast areas of mass housing estates, in our eyes there are more fundamental aspects that define modernism. This special issue shows that, on the one hand, modernism was

more than a one-size-fits-all approach in socialist urban planning; on the other, in a post-socialist context, modern lifestyles and modernist thinking still hold sway even in the midst of "post-modern" architectural styles and planning practices.

We want to make the distinction between a narrow and broad conception of modernism. In the first part, we begin by discussing the "high modernist" approach that Sonia HIRT (and several other authors) conflate with modernism *in toto*. In such a narrow understanding, "modernism" amounts to a particular style in architecture and approach in urban planning and governance. Its rise and fall in both (socialist) "East" and (capitalist) "West" will be historically contextualized and critically appraised. Next, we present the broad conception of modernism as proposed by Marshall BERMAN and others. Here, modernism is much more a cultural response to the experience of modernity and the yearning for being modern. Against this backdrop, we should conceive the counter-movements to high modernist planning as modernist. In the second part, we revisit HIRT's argument about the relationship between post-modernization and post-socialist (urban) transformation. We claim that



Photograph 1: Ruins of of modernity? Ruined modernisms? Abandoned Soviet-era cinema in Khujand, Tajikistan, 2010 (Wladimir Sgibnev)

<sup>1</sup> What Corbusier has in common with the Luftwaffe is that both tried very hard changing the face of Europe. What cyclopes have forgotten in their wrath The pencils will soberly accomplish. (Authors' translation)

her notion of post-modernism does not address the complexity of modernist visions and breadth of its scope as outlined by BERMAN. In conclusion, we pinpoint the major themes addressed by the contributors to this special issue and highlight how we think this volume contributes to scholarly debates about the merit of revisiting and resurrecting modernist urbanism in twenty-first century post-socialist urban contexts and beyond (BUCKMORSS 2000; BECK et al. 1994; GIDDENS and PIERSON 1998).

### What modernity?

The historical-geographical context of relevance to our discussion of modernism (and high modernism) is Europe starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Industrialization in countries such as Great Britain, France, and Germany brought about significant changes to the social order. In fact, it was this situation that created anxieties and a societal discourse around “social order”. Plural, individualized, and impersonal forms of sociality (“*Gesellschaft*” in Tönnies’s terminology) increasingly replaced traditional forms of belonging (“*Gemeinschaft*”). The crisis of laissez-faire liberalism became particularly striking with the experience of the First World War and the economic crisis in the late 1920s. It made the quest for an alternative even more pressing. Zygmunt BAUMAN (1991) thus situates modernity in this context as an era in which the dissolution of traditional lifeworld orientations was engaged with various ordering attempts. While losing conventional forms of social order was perceived with a sense of crisis, modernity is also characterized by the promise of planning the future of society. While to BAUMAN (1989) modernity was responded to with a desire for “racial homogeneity” leading to the Holocaust, it also made possible the conceiving of “working class solidarity” and emancipatory political projects. Several architectural and planning initiatives carrying labels such as “*Bau-*

*haus*”, “*Neues Wohnen*”, and “*Sotsgorod*” were attempts at realizing the emancipatory potential of a new society. For several revolutionaries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, modernism thus appeared as the cultural complement to a fundamental reshaping of society. Applying rationalist principles to architecture and planning raised the prospect of creating cities with reasonable standards of living, including dwelling, work, leisure and transportation for the masses. Against the inequalities created by liberal capitalism, high modernism largely emphasized the goal of building a society of equals.

Insofar as these were attempts at addressing the problem of modernity – the crisis of social order – we can consider all of them as “modernist”. Although modernity facilitated them all, we think that it is important to emphasize their differences. Unfortunately, we detect a certain narrowing of such terms as “modernism” and “modernity” in several disciplines that detaches them from the social and political context. In architecture, for example, modernism often becomes reduced to a repertoire of style; in planning, as we argue in the following, modernism is often equated with a particular state approach to urban development.

### “High modernism” and its limits

In much of the scholarly writing on urbanism and urbanization from the 1960s on, twentieth century modernism figures as an undemocratic imposition on urban citizens (JACOBS 1961; SANDERCOCK 1998a, 1998b). As Marshall BERMAN (1988) and David HARVEY (1990) point out, this reaction is aimed at a specific idea and embodiment of modernism which is sometimes referred to as “high modernism” (HARVEY 1990). Although the first major experiments were carried out in the 1920s and 1930s, this kind of modernism became politically hegemonic in the first three postwar decades in Western capitalist and Soviet socialist countries, as well as beyond. SCOTT (1998, pp. 88-90) describes it as “the aspiration to the administrative ordering of nature and society

(...) [At its] center was a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws. High modernism is thus a particularly sweeping vision of how the benefits of technical and scientific progress might be applied – usually through the state – in every field of human activity”.

High modernism demands a radical break with history and tradition. Inherited or adopted practices and institutions were thought of as obstacles to a rational and scientific ordering of human habits. This called for a radical re-examination and re-designing of various realms of human activity from family to factory production, leisure and residence by applying scientific methods. This practice of “high modernism” was clearly facilitated by the postwar context and HARVEY (1990) locates the high-point in this period. On the one side, cities destroyed in war had to be urgently reconstructed. Facing a scarcity of resources, the situation called for efficient and no-frills solutions. On the other side, civil society, as a potential site of resistance against state projects, had been silenced by wartime authoritarian politics.

At the same time, modernist visions also went beyond the idea of fast relief to postwar cities: The destruction also functioned as a pretext for a slash-and-burn approach for the sake of implementing visions of urban functionalism, as paradigmatically espoused in LE CORBUSIER’S (1973, orig. 1943) Athens Charter following the 4<sup>th</sup> CIAM (Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne) in 1933. Particularly in war-torn societies, the appeal of such functionalism was in overcoming the painful past with the promise of a freer and more exciting future. The claim

<sup>2</sup> There are various other modernisms emerging in other parts of the world (colonies, North America etc.) that are connected to the “European” kinds (ROBINSON 2006; GAONKAR 2000).



Photograph 2: Model of the former GDR-City Centre of Berlin in scale 1:500, Berlin, Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment, 2011 (Markus Kip)

was to improve living conditions not only for the elite, but also for the masses.

The modernist vision of the Athens Charter distinguished four essential urban functions (dwelling, recreation, work, and transportation) that were to be spatially separated to maximize (economic) efficiency and improve living quality. This planning vision drew on Fordist production strategies that were to be applied in the building of cities. Cities were conceived as “living machines” (HARVEY 1990, p. 31) to be modelled rationally in analogy to the “machine” or the “factory”. The “traditional city” with its mixed-usages clearly was anathema to this vision. Further, the “traditional city” was perceived as overcrowded and unhygienic, a concern that several architects and planners hoped to eradicate once and for all. Frequently, social reformers also viewed the prevalence of crime and violence as correlated with spatial conditions. A most radical disavowal of traditional urbanism can be found in *Space, Time and Architecture*, in which Sigfried GIEDION (1967, orig. 1941) made the case for the ‘slash and burn’ method of revitalizing existing cities in conformity with urban functionalism. In this book, GIEDION executes LE CORBUSIER’s battle cry to “Kill the street!” and elevates the car as a central consideration for planning, thus giving priority to highway construction as the main tool of urban planning. In this approach, the aesthetics of “Bauhaus” or the “Internation-

ational Style” was invoked in order to justify and ideologically transfigure the no-frills (and cost-saving) approach in architecture and planning.

### High modernist planning in Eastern and Western Europe

There are striking similarities in terms of high modernist planning in Eastern and Western Europe. In the West, it hardly challenged capitalism per se, merely seeking to tame its excesses and give a rational framework for the sake of (capitalist) economic growth. Le Corbusier’s Athens Charter for example, emphasized the significance of reigning in land speculation and private interests through enforcement of major planning schemes in the “public interest”. In this view, the problem was the fragmented character of capital interests and thus potential conflicts that would work to the detriment of collective interests.

Even if economic regulation differed in socialist countries, applying “the yardstick of space – or, more precisely, the yardstick of spatial practice – to societies with a ‘socialist’ mode of production” (LEFEBVRE 1997, p. 54), Henri LEFEBVRE suggests that the socialist model did not differ much from their capitalist counterparts. As LEFEBVRE (2009, p. 206) notes, “with regard to the treatment of space, the ‘model’ of (Soviet) State socialism offers only a buttressed and worsened version of the capi-

talist ‘model’; accelerated in accordance with the model, planned growth accentuates the privileges of ‘implantations’, those of industries and the decision-making centers; the other places remain passive (peripheral)”.

LEFEBVRE castigated *state socialism*, as he calls it, for spatial disparities have not been alleviated, but expanded in scope and intensity. He saw the same undistinguishable mode of space production on both sides of the Iron Curtain, two “bureaucratic regimes of controlled consumption, oriented toward economic growth”; with the Soviet distinction of an “emphasis on collective consumption” (STANEK 2011, p. 64).

Soviet planning theory established the city as “the cradle of progress and [...] a generative model of transformative modernity” (ALEXANDER, BUCHLI, and HUMPHREY 2007, p. 3). The significance of the city in Soviet society is also underscored by the fact that it “underwent a process of urbanization unparalleled in European history” as Thomas M. BOHN (2014, p. 121) argues. Although Soviet modernity took several twists and turns – Stefan PLAGGENBORG (2006) describes this history as an “experiment” – an instrumentalist understanding of the city is characteristic of Soviet urbanism throughout. Caroline HUMPHREY (2005, p. 39) argues that “the task of Soviet construction was to build material foundations that would mould nothing less than a new society”, with architecture being “one of the key arenas of ideology” on its way towards the creation of the Socialist Man. Architecture, and Soviet mega-projects in particular, were called to strengthen societal bonds and safeguard a particular interpretation of the past (GESTWA 2004). Soviet architecture ran through a variety of transformation as BOHN (2014, p. 119-120) points out, from the constructionist “Sotsgorod”, to the “socialist realism” of the Stalinist era and finally to the functionalist “Soviet” or “Communist city” beginning with Khrushchev. Throughout these periods, Soviet

authorities “perceived the policy of a concerted regulation of space (*Raumordnungspolitik*)” as the key to domination and re-creation of the social body (GESTWA 2004, p. 43) – and this instrumentalist conception of space has survived in many contemporary post-socialist settings.

In the past, researchers debated whether this mode of development was evidence of a specifically “socialist city” (FRENCH and HAMILTON 1979; MORTON and STUART 1984) or rather a blending of historical (capitalist) patterns of industrialization and new socialist planning policies. Hartmut HÄUSSERMANN (1996) uses the notion of “city under socialism” to refer to this amalgamation (see also SZELÉNYI 1996; BODENSCHATZ and POST 2003). Both socialist as well as capitalist versions of high modernism preferred large-scale urban and industrial development projects that were to boost growth and national economic competitiveness. Explaining such similarity on both sides of the iron curtain, SCOTT (1998, p. 99) writes:

“The vision of society in which social conflict was eliminated in favor of technological and scientific imperatives could embrace liberal, socialist, authoritarian, and even communist and fascist solutions. Productivism, in short, was politically promiscuous.”

In this respect, it is also instructive to read Scott’s discussion of LE CORBUSIER’S career and work. Among his far-reaching lobbying efforts to various countries East and West, North and South, LE CORBUSIER lobbied the Soviet elite for his new plan for Moscow in the 1930s, which he later reused “virtually intact – aside from removing all references to Moscow . . . (..) as *La ville radieuse*, suitable for central Paris” (SCOTT 1998, p. 114). Thus, SCOTT (1998, p. 113) claims that LE CORBUSIER “would clearly have settled for any state authority that would give him a free hand”. Nevertheless, SCOTT (1998, pp. 101-102) contends that the high modernist planning had greater inroads in so-

cialist countries than in liberal capitalist countries in which the polity had checked unrestrained exercise of power by the political elite, particularly through their specific institutionalizations of privacy, economy and political representation.

One important avenue for high modernist aspirations was the field of urban planning. The promise of planning was that knowledge of social laws could bring about a rational steering of social relationships and phenomena (SANDERCOCK 2003, p. 26). Planning called for uncovering the laws of morality and society and legitimated scientific experts’ ability to influence social organization in order to bring about desired goals. Not only that, the determination of social goals was believed to be best left in the hands of “objective” scientists. Scholars like BAUMAN (1989) thus argue that the modernist faith in rationality assumed the character of a substitute for de-legitimized religions.

The state figured as a benevolent and all-powerful agent for the sake of realizing a better future for all. SCOTT (1998) thus points out that high modernist thinking was inherently authoritarian and sought to justify privileges of the ruling elite of state intellectuals. In this vein, James HOLSTON (1989) argues that “*The Modernist City*” was realized by abstracting from concrete everyday life concerns and denying the significance of history. Its implementation made use of ruthless techniques for uprooting a population (SANDERCOCK 2003, p. 33).

Eventually resistance against such high modernist practices and their undemocratic implementation grew and developed into counter-movements. Probably, the first major systematic criticism against high modernist approaches of city planning, was formulated by Jane JACOBS (1961) in her book “*The Death and Life of Great American Cities*”. JACOBS criticizes that planners’ accounts of the city only bring limited aspects of social reality into view. Below the radar of rationalist planning, everyday life is made up by a myriad of practices and relationships that fulfill important functions in peoples’

lives, including social control, crime prevention, communication, and mutual aid. Since these relationships also have the capacity to adapt to new and unforeseen purposes, Jacobs advocated for the jumble and seeming chaos that she identifies as characteristic of urban space. High modernist approaches, from her perspective, fail to see social problems as the result of historical and structural causes which call for a different engagement than just planning and design. Due to her opposition against official modernist endeavours of New York’s arch planner, Robert Moses, Jacobs’s account has often been described as “anti-modern”. Several scholars, however, have tried to resuscitate a modernist conception of such opposition, including Marshall Berman, for whom Jacobs is just another hero of modernism.

### Modernism as an unfinished project of modernity

The broader conceptualization of modernism draws from Marshall BERMAN’S works on the subject. Modernism, according to him, refers to a set of visions and approaches responding to a “mode of vital experience [...] that is shared by men and women all over the world today” (BERMAN 1988, p. 15). The notion of modernism relates to human attempts to shape the future, aware of the continual maelstrom of modernity that subjects purposes, methods, and meanings to an ongoing process of change.

“To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are” (BERMAN 1988, p. 15).

BERMAN’S conception of modernism is thus a paradoxical one: The ostensible aim to assert dignity and find oneself at home in modern times is consistently undermined by the modernizing process in which (following Marx’s dictum) “all that is solid melts into air”. The challenge then

is, in Baudelaire's words, to "extract the eternal from the ephemeral".

Given its radical promise of overcoming chains of tradition and convention, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, modernism was often linked with the political left. At the same time, scholars such as BAUMAN and HARVEY argue that modernity's upheaval in all social realms and its causation of uncertainties in the foundations of individual and social life opened the path for reactionary political responses. The high modernist approach and its faith in science and progress pretended to fill this foundational void. Frederic JAMESON (1984) is therefore right to point out that the appropriation of modernism by hegemonic powers brought about a loss in its revolutionary appeal throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, in the post-World War II context, HARVEY (1990, p. 37) argues that "artistic and cultural, as well as 'progressive' political revolt had to be directed at a powerful version of modernism itself".

BERMAN makes a useful distinction between modernism, modernization, and modernity. These moments are distinct, yet in a dialectical relationship to each other. *Modernism* seeks to guide the process of modernization and bring multifaceted developments into some kind of coherence with a specific purpose. *Modernization* unfolds in various fields, developments in science, technology, economics, art and culture, morality and law. The process of modernization continually brings about unintended social consequences and changes the conditions for conceiving of a modernist project. The experience of this dynamic is called *modernity*, and, in turn, shapes how subjects engage in these modernizing processes as well as their (modernist) ideas about them. The distinction between these moments helps to clarify that not everything *modern* is necessarily *modernist*, and that not everything that is *modernist* will, in fact, advance the process of *modernization* in any straightforward way.

This division into three moments allows for a reassessment of modernism

and its legacies and suggests the possibility of adopting a critical position that falls somewhere between 'modernolatry' and modernist-bashing (JENCKS 2007). In particular, a historical contextualization is critical in this endeavour. Contemplating on the abandonment of high modernist approaches (aimed at an overcoming of history), that is often equated with a post-modern rupture (and its nostalgia for the past), BERMAN (1988, p. 332) writes:

"What happened in the 1970s was that, as the gigantic motors of economic growth and expansion stalled, and the traffic came close to a stop, modern societies abruptly lost their power to blow away their past. All through the 1960s, the question had been whether they should or shouldn't; now, in the 1970s, the answer was that they simply couldn't."

Apologists for modernism like BERMAN and others (DEKKER 2000; HIGGOTT 2007) highlight the plurality of twentieth century modern ideas and modernism's embrace of more than architecture or planning alone. Jennifer ROBINSON (2006) cautions, though, against an approach that is limited to a range of Western-centric concepts alone (refer also to MITCHELL 2000). In other words, modernism is far from being a homogeneous set of ideas, nor should it be mistaken to have originated in a geographic region such as "Europe", "the West" etc. (refer to GAONKAR 2001).

While accepting that many twentieth century modern dreams ended in catastrophe, Susan BUCK-MORSS (2000) argues that we should work through the ruins of twentieth century modern dreams to reassess and redeem the modern ideas behind them. In trying to turn modernist legacies constructively, Leonie SANDERCOCK (2003) claims that modernism's major fault was its pretence of objectivity and (political) impartiality. It denied communicative rationality that takes (different) subjectivities and their interactions as the starting point for developing

common pursuits. What we can learn from this experience, however, is a re-imagination of planning as "transparently" political. In essence, she makes a similar argument to Jürgen HABERMAS's (1990) attempt to resuscitate "The Unfinished Project of Modernity" by differentiating realms of social life that require different rationalities, instrumental and communicative.

It is worthwhile remembering BERMAN's account of modernism, in which not only LE CORBUSIER, GIEDION, and Robert Moses pose as figureheads of modernist thinking, but also Jane Jacobs and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Thus, historically, modernism was not just about what we would call the "narrow" conception of modernism, the "high modernist" planning visions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century state professionals, but also about several movements against such top-down modernization projects. In particular, BERMAN (1988, p. 318) recognizes JACOBS' contribution in the following terms:

"Jacobs' point is that the so-called modern movement has inspired billions of dollars' worth of 'urban renewal' whose paradoxical result has been to destroy the only kind of environment in which modern values can be realized. The practical corollary of all this – which sounds paradoxical at first, but in fact makes perfect sense – is that in our city life, for the sake of the modern we must preserve the old and resist the new. With this dialectic, modernism takes on a new complexity and depth."

For BERMAN, modernism is thus much more than a simple denial of history and an effort to wipe away the remnants of the past, in both conceptual as well as physical terms. In his view, many modernists (such as Walter Benjamin) have emphasized the significance of history as an accumulation of catastrophes that weighs on the present. A liberating engagement with the present means coming to terms with the unfulfilled promises of the past.

## Exploring modernism and in the context of the post-socialist transformation

Let us take a look at Sonia HIRT's argument about post-modernization in a post-socialist context from this perspective. HIRT (2008, p. 785) claims that "postsocialist cities represent textbook examples of urban postmodernization, much as socialist cities epitomized the essential legacy of modernist urbanity". Although her case studies, Belgrade and Sofia, show differences in terms of the speed and course of transition, HIRT considers them confirmations to her argument. The overall direction of developments is clear for HIRT and she further hypothesizes that these changes are "inherent to East European postsocialism" (HIRT 2008, p. 786).

HIRT starts from a characterization of the socialist city, drawing on the work of sociologist Ivan SZELÉNYI (1996, pp. 300-303) who highlights three distinctive features: "(1) lack of functional diversity (especially shortage of commercial functions); (2) striking grandeur and rigid order of spaces and buildings, as exhibited in colossal but visually disciplined public plazas and massive housing estates; and (3) oppressive monotony of architectural styles" (quoted in HIRT 2008, p. 786). These features are logically connected to the ideology of the socialist regimes as they respectively prioritize production over consumption, the "public" over the "private" and discipline over diversity (HIRT 2008, p. 789).

These features of the socialist city, as HIRT (2008, p. 791) emphasizes, were a radical realization of modernist principles:

"Indeed, it was under socialist auspices that the modernist dream of limitless industrial progress (at the expense of simple, everyday pleasures), and an omnipotent, rational, and ostensibly just public realm (at the expense of small, private freedoms) was pushed to its limits and executed, so vigorously and meticulously, in the organization of urban space."

HIRT thus agrees with BAUMAN's (1991, p. 38) assessment of socialism as "modernity's most devout, vigorous and gallant champion" (quoted in HIRT 2008, p. 791).

With the breakdown of socialist regimes, the political economy, that had backed up the emphasis on production, the public realm and discipline, collapsed, and was replaced by a rather radical implementation of a market economy. As a result, as HIRT outlines in her article, the strict spatial segregation of functions was watered down, space became a regular commodity, real estate was bought and sold, and commercial enterprises emerged throughout the city in an almost unregulated legal environment. In the same process, public space was increasingly subjected to private vested interests (also refer to STANILOV 2007, p. 272) and the state no longer sought the implementation of large-scale master plans, which it could not afford to implement in any case. Instead, private development activities assumed increasing importance in urban development. Furthermore, the privatization of city spaces also made possible the diversification of architectural styles, advanced by the "nouveau riche" who desired radically individualist architectural expressions (HIRT 2008, p. 790).

It should be clear from the prior discussion of modernism that HIRT's discussion, in fact, relates to the high modernist approach, but hardly modernism *in toto*. What she describes as distinctive for the modernist approach in socialist regimes thus was the radical implementation of the (natural) science-based administration and organization of space. Her identification of the "high modernist" approach with modernism per se confronts two significant problems. First, as we have seen, this approach was fraught with contradictions, since its inherent belief in the state and natural scientific approaches was at odds with the radical distrust of modernism against anything seemingly "solid". Second, the high modernist strategies were also subjected to modernist critique for imposing homogeneous spaces while undermining the essence of

modernity, radical change and diversification.

In this respect, it might be asked to what extent modernist desires undermined such state-directed modernization in HIRT's case studies of Belgrade and Sofia. Why not understand these changes in analogy to JACOBS and her fellow activists' opposition to urban renewal in the United States? To be sure, architectural styles, planning approaches and forms of governance have changed, but does this imply a fundamental break with the modern experience that promises "adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are" (BERMAN 1988, p. 15)? Here, we would highlight the fact that we should not deduce cultural and social shifts à la "post-modernization" from changes in state governance of urban development. Modernism and post-modernism might just exist in a more complex jumble than the "framework of a global modern-to-postmodern urban change" (HIRT 2008, p. 787) assumes. Just as the political economy remains a contested terrain in post-socialist contexts, we should also expect struggles over the meaning of modernism and post-modernism. In this respect, dealing with the built legacy of high modernism is a politicized endeavour as several contributions to this issue discuss.

## Discussion of contributions

In the course of the following articles, the special issue scrutinizes modernist articulations in the socialist period and their legacy in the post-socialist context. Complicating simple identifications of socialism as quintessentially modernist, we start out with highlighting historical and geographical variance in modernism and urban modernity in the socialist period. Further on, we turn to the transformation of urban realities that carried a strong socialist imprint. Instead of being examples for a wholesale post-modernization, the cases presented demonstrate the ongoing hold and re-interpretations of



modern imaginaries and modernist structures in the post-socialist everyday.

The paper by Markus KIP, Douglas YOUNG and Lisa DRUMMOND proposes a notion of “socialist modernism” to understand the development of Alexanderplatz in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the 1960s. While the socialist era development on Alexanderplatz was staged as a realization of the modernist vision, the 1960s design of Alexanderplatz also includes distinctive ‘socialist’ features, notably the emphasis on centrality and visually dominant tall structures that are in striking contrast to the (Western) high modernist canon. The contribution shows how the GDR-era “Alex”, as the square is colloquially termed, contrasts with stylizations of the “socialist city” as proposed by HIRT or SZELÉNYI. The authors argue this point in view of the functional diversity and variety of architecture at Alexanderplatz.

The socialist modernist project also encompassed recreation, as analysed by Anke HAGEMANN. Between the late 1950s and early 70s, four big holiday resorts were built from scratch on the Black Sea Coast of Bulgaria and became testing grounds for an uncompromisingly modern architecture, urbanism and lifestyle. Sun, sand and sea were turned into an all-round “tourist product”, comprehensively developed, neatly packaged, and marketed internationally to the masses. Soon, holiday resorts and tourism infrastructure became ‘an exciting new polyglot playground for the world’ (1960s promotional film) and the primary showcase of contemporary Bulgarian architectural practice. Yet planning practices and architectural images of modernism in the Bulgarian seaside resorts have shifted from era to era: from the history of the first centrally planned holiday resorts of the late 1950s to the 1970s mass tourism, all the way to privatization and the construction boom and bust on the Black Sea Coast in the last decade. Case studies of the resorts Sunny Beach and Albena demonstrate how differently tourism, planning and real estate actors deal with the built heritage and modernist ideas today:

from radical neglect within an eclectic urban chaos to a more respectful, clear-sighted upgrading.

Whereas under Soviet rule, state authorities decided on the growth of cities as industrial or administrative bases, cities in post-Soviet Russia have to compete in a globalized economy. Searching for investors and new residents, city-branding and the production of images have become important tasks. Using the case of the Russian city of Perm’, Daniela ZUPAN examines the role of the Soviet modernist urban heritage in the production of these new images. Her goal is to go beyond an understanding of the modernist urban heritage as a failed experiment and to reassess the underlying ideals and guiding principles of the Soviet socialist city, while at the same time drawing attention to occurring disparities between these ideals and their realization. Through top-down initiatives an attempt was being made to create an image showing Perm’ as a prospering, international, European city, mirroring the modernizing paternalism of the Soviet era, yet with a different aesthetics this time. The desired urban vision consists of images focusing on European and international standards and drawing attention to the pre-socialist ‘European’ past, while blaming the socialist era and the Soviet modernist urban structures for many of the current problems. However, neither the cultural nor the urban transformation process, both implemented as top-down-initiatives, were based on existing resources. This has resulted in the emergence of a broad opposition among the local elite and the general population in Perm’.

The remodelling of Soviet housing stock after the fall of the USSR provides insight into contemporary negotiations of modernity. This is the aim of the paper by Wladimir SGIBNEV, which deals with spatial expressions of modernity in contemporary urban Tajikistan through an exploration of the notion of *remont*. The importance of this concept, imported from the Russian language and adopted in Tajik since, is rooted in the Soviet past: already the Soviet society could be de-

scribed as a “society of remont” (GERASIMOVA and ČUJKINA 2004), striving for an everyday remedy to the Soviet state’s unfulfilled promises of modernity. Yet remont is more than a remnant of the Soviet era, but a practice to reach a culturally regulated normative set of spatial morality. Remont is intimately tied to life-cycle rituals such as circumcisions, weddings and funerals. It is therefore performed in a way which has to accommodate both traditional spatial patterns and constantly changing aesthetic requirements of modernity. The paper proposes a “rhythmic” reading of spatial features of modernity and strives to add to the discussion on post-socialist modernity – highly relevant for contemporary Central Asia, and in a process of constant renegotiation. The appropriation and transformation of Soviet central spaces after the demise of state socialism and their integration into a new modernist nation-building agenda is the focal point of Tsypylma DARIEVA’s contribution. Using the example of public space in Baku, she explores how industrialization, urbanization, Europeanization and secularization come together to form a modernist urban project in the post-socialist period. The revitalization of the waterfront promenade as the showpiece of a new Eurasian capital is controlled by elite groups, the government, and commercial interests, just as it was at the beginning of the twentieth century. What is different about contemporary urbanism is the desire to link the city status and its aesthetic to a new global geography distinct from the Soviet one. The local confrontation over efforts to make the waterfront more attractive to tourists and investors involves an active attempt to create a global image of Baku as “Dubai of the Caspian Sea”.

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## Резюме

МАРКУС КИП, ВЛАДИМИР СГИБНЕВ

**Введение: Модернизм и (пост)социалистический город**  
«Постмодернизм» и «постсоциализм» – две основные концепции, часто используемые для объяснения урбанистических изменений, произошедших в течение последних десятилетий. Существует широко распространённое мнение, что социалистическое градостроительство должно рассматриваться в качестве квинтэссенции модернистского мышления. Трансформация постсоциализма таким образом логично представляется в качестве примера постмодернизации. В обзорной статье такое положение ставится под вопрос и утверждается, что модернистские подходы и опыт модерна были более разнообразными и сложными, нежели предполагается в соответствующей периодизации. В статье предлагается различать узкое и широкое толкование понятия модернизма. В первой части обсуждается традиционный подход, который часто и ассоциируется с модернизмом как таковым. В таком узком понимании «модернизм» относится к определённому архитектурному стилю и соответствующему подходу к городскому планированию и управлению городским хозяйством. Затем представлена широкая концепция модернизма, а именно, модернизм как культурный ответ на опыт модерна и стремление быть таковым. При этом доказывается, что необходимо также проанализировать сложность и многообразие модернистских идей. Наконец, определяются основные темы, рассматриваемые авторами предлагаемых в сборнике статей по конкретным вопросам. Кроме того, указывается, почему данный сборник представляет собой важный вклад в оживление научных дискуссий о значении модернистского градостроительства в постсоциалистическом урбанистическом контексте 21-го века.

Постмодернизм, постсоциализм, трансформация, планирование в Восточной и Западной Европе

## Résumé

MARKUS KIP, WLADIMIR SGIBNEV

**Introduction: le modernisme et la ville (post-)socialiste**  
Le «post-modernisme» et le «post-socialisme» sont deux approches très largement utilisées ces dernières décennies afin d'interpréter les transformations urbaines. L'urbanisme socialiste est souvent considéré comme la personnification centrale de la pensée moderniste: la transformation vers le post-socialisme apparaît par conséquent comme un exemple de post-modernisation. Cet article de synthèse remet en cause une telle identification, justifiant que les initiatives modernistes et que l'expérience du moderne ont été bien plus diverses et complexes que ce que cette périodisation ne laisse entendre. Dans cet article, nous souhaitons faire la distinction entre une conception large et étroite du modernisme. Dans la première partie, nous commençons par parler de l'approche «haut-moderniste», souvent assimilée au modernisme dans son ensemble. Dans une compréhension aussi étroite, le «modernisme» représente un style architectural particulier ainsi qu'une approche de planification et de gouvernance urbaine particulière. Nous offrons ensuite une conception large du modernisme en le présentant comme une réponse culturelle à l'expérience de la modernité et au désir ardent d'être moderne. Nous défendons la nécessité de faire face à la complexité et à l'ampleur des visions modernistes. En conclusion, nous identifions les principaux thèmes abordés par les contributeurs sur cette question particulière et mettons en valeur la manière dont nous pensons que ce volume contribue aux débats intellectuels sur l'intérêt de revisiter et de ressusciter l'urbanisme moderniste dans les contextes urbains post-socialistes du XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle et au-delà.

Post-modernisme, post-socialisme, transformation, planification dans l'Europe orientale et occidentale