Ideology and Urbanism in a Flux
Making Sofia Socialist in the Stalinist Period and Beyond

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Abstract

The socialist reconstruction of Sofia evolved at the juncture of institution-building, formation of professional expertise and social engineering, framed by a party ideology in a flux that time and again revised the social mission of urbanism and the professional role of the architect. This paper first focuses on four areas of Sofia's reconstruction that illustrate the interplay of ideology and urbanism in the Stalinist years: the endorsement and subsequent betrayal of Marxist guidelines for urban planning; the replication of the leader cult and its prime monument, the Mausoleum; the reorganization of architects into a Soviet-style professional union; the application of the Stalinist art canon in monumental architecture. The paper then discusses how de-Stalinization affected urban planning, public architecture and architects' professional standing. It concludes by reflecting on the post-1989 transformation of Sofia as a radical breach with socialism or a symptom of path dependence.

Keywords

In 1931, Lazar Kaganovich, First Secretary of the Moscow Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), proclaimed: "Our cities became socialist from the very moment of the October Revolution, when we expropriated the bourgeoisie and socialized the means of production" (Kaganovich 1931: 82). Insofar as this statement was the stepping stone of Kaganovich's blueprint for the socialist reconstruction of Moscow and other Soviet cities, it might have provided some guidance for political reform to the later adherents

to state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe, but what it implied for the practice of urban planners and architects there was far from self-evident. This paper deals with the transfer of knowledge from the Soviet Union to the capital of one of its satellites, Sofia, in the postwar years of Stalinism. This transfer is tackled through the permeation of ideology and city making—or what can be qualified as an endeavor to translate political ideologemes into spatial design.

Since the socialist city first attracted scholarly attention within the fields of history of architecture and urban studies, its typological specificity has for a long time been treated with a narrow focus on its material form. That is, all that differentiates it from the synchronous cities of Western liberal democracies with free market economies is often reduced to matters of art style, or patterns of land use and distribution of amenities (e.g. Paperny 2002, French and Hamilton 1979, Andrusz at al. 1996). When the political economy of state socialism enters these discussions, it is through the channel of ideology which however is seen as something rather external to the city as such: the impetus behind party diktat that forced the choice of one architectural style over another or the prioritization of certain socio-spatial arrangements, as well as the utopian vision of society that those choices presumably reflected. Hence, the uniqueness of the socialist type of city is judged by its success or failure to produce its own architectural expression or to embody socialist norms in the urban structure. In recent years, several case studies have enriched these approaches to socialist urbanity by highlighting administrative processes of policy-making, bureaucratic restructuring of professional expertise, conditions of everyday life, agendas of social engineering and patterns of social mobility as integral not only to a proper understanding of the dynamics of urban development under socialism but also to the very nature of the socialist city (e.g. Zarecor 2011, Lebow 2013, Molnár 2013, Harris 2013; see also Kokin 1997, Crowley and Reid 2002).

The analysis below embraces this complex perspective towards the socialist city, positioning its development at the juncture of institution-building, formation of professional expertise and social engineering. This juncture was no doubt framed by the party ideology which however, far from being static and monolithic, underwent interpretative changes and bore unresolved contradictions. This paper explores the early Sovietization of Sofia through four aspects of the dual transfer of political ideology and urbanist practice: the endorsement and subsequent betrayal of the Marxist call for abolishing the difference between town and country in postwar urban planning; the replication of Lenin's Mausoleum and the underlying leader cult in the construction of Georgi Dimitrov's Mausoleum; the institutional reorganization of architects

into a Soviet-style professional union; the application of socialist realism in monumental architecture. After analyzing the emulation of Soviet ideas and practices in the Stalinist years, the paper outlines the changes induced by de-Stalinization that affected urban planning, public architecture and architects' professional standing from the mid-1950s into the 1960s. The epilogue touches upon the post-1989 transformation of Sofia in light of its socialist legacy, posing the question to what extent recent urban development manifests a radical breach with the past or path dependence.

The Interplay between Socialist Ideology and Urbanism

The translation of socialist ideology into urbanism is not necessarily ciphered in stylistic particularities, contrary to the expectations of some art historians. The notion that socialist ideology is reflected in a specific artistic outlook finds a particularly strong voice with regard to Stalinism. This is exemplified by the seminal work of Vladimir Paperny (2002), which emphasizes the rigid and static nature of Soviet architecture in the period following Stalin's consolidation of power in the late 1920s. Paperny's assessment is grounded on a distinction between the Stalinist architectural canon of socialist realism and the revolutionary experimentation with brave new designs of the earlier avant-garde movement in Soviet urbanism. This contrasting comparison outlines a series of oppositions characterizing the two trends: movement versus immobility, horizontality versus verticality, uniformity versus hierarchism, collectivism versus individualism, improvisation versus notation.

Shining through this treatment of Stalinist architecture is a strongly evaluative judgment lamenting the closure of avant-gardism after the state centralization of the artistic milieu in 1932. Whereas for Paperny this institutional reform is a condition for ideological subordination of socialist architecture and hence an endpoint to its artistic originality, in this paper the top-down reorganization of architects' unions with the ensuing bureaucratic tensions is analyzed as an equally significant dimension of socialist urbanism alongside issues of artistic style. Seen in this light, the hijacking of technical practice by an expanding state apparatus is understood not as an endpoint but as the beginning of a sinuous process of negotiating the roles and tasks of technical cadres vis-à-vis political command.

Against Paperny's dichotomous story of Soviet architecture, Boris Groys (2003) develops an interpretation based on the notion of evolution rather than a breach. In his perspective, socialist realism is seen as a stylistic contender subscribing to the same fundamental mission that the avant-garde had

earlier embraced. This point is important because it underscores the variety of manifestations that the interplay between art and ideology assumed over time. With respect to the socialist city, such an understanding grants precedence to ideological compatibilities over stylistic discords. Even when short of artistic originality, the socialist city still correlated to the political line that was endorsed at the time.

The antithetical delineation of an ideologically induced rift in Soviet architecture is contested also by Anders Åman (2002). His critique targets the grounding of Paperny's oppositions on presumably evident stylistic contrasts which he identifies as variants of the clash between modernism and traditionalism. Arguing against such an evaluation, Åman's general point is that political ideology cannot be deduced from the art forms alone. For him, the relationship between architecture and ideology was far more complex than suggested by its reduction to a purely stylistic expression (ibid., 256). Yet, Åman himself does not completely abandon such a mechanistic treatment of this relationship when he concludes that "architecture *does* have expression, but ideological meaning is *added* to it" (ibid., 257). His interpretation of this link as additive suggests that ideology was applied to art externally and only secondarily. In this paper, in contrast, the relation between ideology and architecture is viewed as essential: architects' work was motivated, guided and structured in many ways, not the least of which was the institutional, by the accepted ideology. Furthermore, the interplay between ideology and urbanism took place beneath the façade of architectural expression by privileging certain spatial segments, land uses, public functions and institutional processes of making the city.

All this being said, the guiding ideology was neither inflexible, nor was its translation in urban planning and architecture free of ambiguities. Political visions often translated into mutually contradictory urbanist principles, and ideology itself was subjected to reevaluation that nurtured new concerns for the urban environment. Furthermore, the bureaucratic apparatus that supervised urban development was hardly the "united front" imagined by the rhetoric of "democratic centralism" under the leadership of the party. It was fragmented into sectors that pursued their own agendas, strove to fulfill their own plan targets and, as a result, saturated urban affairs with inter-institutional conflicts (Bater 1980: 40–41; Hamilton 1979: 201–2). Finally, the translation of ideology into urban planning and architecture was not a mere opportunistic act on the part of the technical cadres. Their effort to give technical expression to political ideology in the socialist reconstruction of Sofia was intertwined with the institutional history of Bulgarian architects—the evolution of their professional stakes, credentials and reflections.

Sovietizing Urban Planning: Abolishing the Difference between Center and Periphery

Coming out of World War II and into the sphere of influence of the USSR, Bulgaria underwent a process of Sovietization that affected not only its political system and economy but also all professional fields and employment allocation within them. This process started shortly after the communist-led coup of September 9, 1944, hailed as a native socialist revolution. In the realm of architecture, regime change meant, on the one hand, promotion of a new urban arrangement that would reflect the new political values of the state and enhance their instilment in society, and, on the other hand, reorganization of the associations of architects into state-managed bureaus under party supervision. Both processes were inspired by Soviet models of space production and governance. In the so-called "socialist reconstruction" of Sofia, this transfer shaped urban plans, iconic architecture, art theory and institutional structures.

As the Marxist-Leninist doctrine had to be pursued in all spheres of professional practice, architects faced the challenge of lending content to the urbanistically vague ideal of a socialist city (Musil 2003: 27). In this task, one of the few guidelines provided was the Marxist call for leveling the discrepancies between town and country, thus creating a social world of equality in conditions of life and access to amenities.

The postwar master plan of Sofia was ratified in late 1945 as the foundation on which Bulgarian planners and architects were expected to launch the socialist reconstruction of the capital, thus also setting the tone for a nationwide urban transformation. In the words of Lyuben Tonev, author of the plan and head of the municipal Architecture and Urban Planning Department (AUPD), the leitmotif of his "concept for the future city" was to redirect improvements from the center, which had previously "absorbed all financial resources and public works" to the periphery, "monotonous and grey—abandoned to sprawl endlessly and lost in mud, misery and a lack of any basic living conditions" (Tonev 1945: 39). In its attempt to decentralize amenities in a network of secondary centers and equalize quality of life throughout the city, Tonev's plan was indeed a faithful adaptation of the Marxist call for abolishing the town-country divide to the microlevel of the city. However, the newly appointed city authorities did not trust local architects' capacity to envisage what a socialist city should look like, and instead relied on Soviet tutelage. This was safeguarded through the involvement of prominent Soviet architects in the assessment and revision of the master plan—most notably, Alexey Shchusev, designer of Lenin's Mausoleum in Moscow, and Nikolai Baranov, the chief architect of Leningrad (ibid., 45).

Despite Tonev's preference for a decentralized pattern of urban development, in the ensuing construction program the city administration gave primacy to the center and especially to the square next to the former Royal Palace whose fate to be demolished was sealed by the master plan. In this aspect, the vision for the Bulgarian socialist capital diverged from the Soviet model, since in Moscow the Tsarist bastion of the Kremlin had been reclaimed by the Soviet leadership as a symbol of imperial glory (Anderson 1991: 160). Devoid of a long historical tradition, the Royal Palace in Sofia was moreover perceived as the seat of foreign power—the German dynasty of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha that had ruled the country until the socialist coup in 1944. By pulling down the palace, the replanning of the square held a powerful potential to signal the recent regime change. Indeed, this square would soon be renamed "Ninth of September" to honor Bulgaria's socialist revolution, and the monarchy was officially overhauled through a referendum in September 1946. This placed the square at the very center of the reconstruction of Sofia.

Endorsed by the central authorities, the policy of embellishing the center at the expense of the periphery no doubt had an ambivalent ideological footing. Yet, it followed the Soviet path of urban development, the benchmark of which, the General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow of 1935, was based on a pronouncedly radial scheme promoting the aggrandizement of the central area around the seat of Soviet power (Bater 1980: 29–30). On the one hand, the prioritization of the monumental refurbishment of Sofia's center reflected the party's taste for symbolic representation in opulent landmarks. On the other hand, it clearly compromised the declared socialist mission of the reconstruction to improve the living conditions of the working class that resided far from the center (Stanoeva 2013: 63–9). The latter's housing situation had been aggravated not only by prior neglect, but also by the wartime air raids: 95% of 5,288 damaged buildings were private, mainly ramshackle houses of one story, and more than half of the owners belonged to the proletariat (SGS 1958: 136; Genev 1947: 63). The housing crisis was further complicated by the legislative provisions for rebuilding the housing stock, which not only levied the expenses on homeowners, but also gave municipal authorities exclusive rights to mandate repairs and execute them through compulsory mortgaging (DV 1945: 2). Dogmatically applying the Soviet doctrine of limiting landowners' property rights to prevent speculative renting (Stoilov 1946: 14–6), this policy contradicted the real situation of postwar deterioration, where most damaged properties were the owner-occupied family homes of impoverished households.

Following the adoption of the master plan, the reconstruction of Sofia focused on the central area, triggering a series of competitions for its detailed
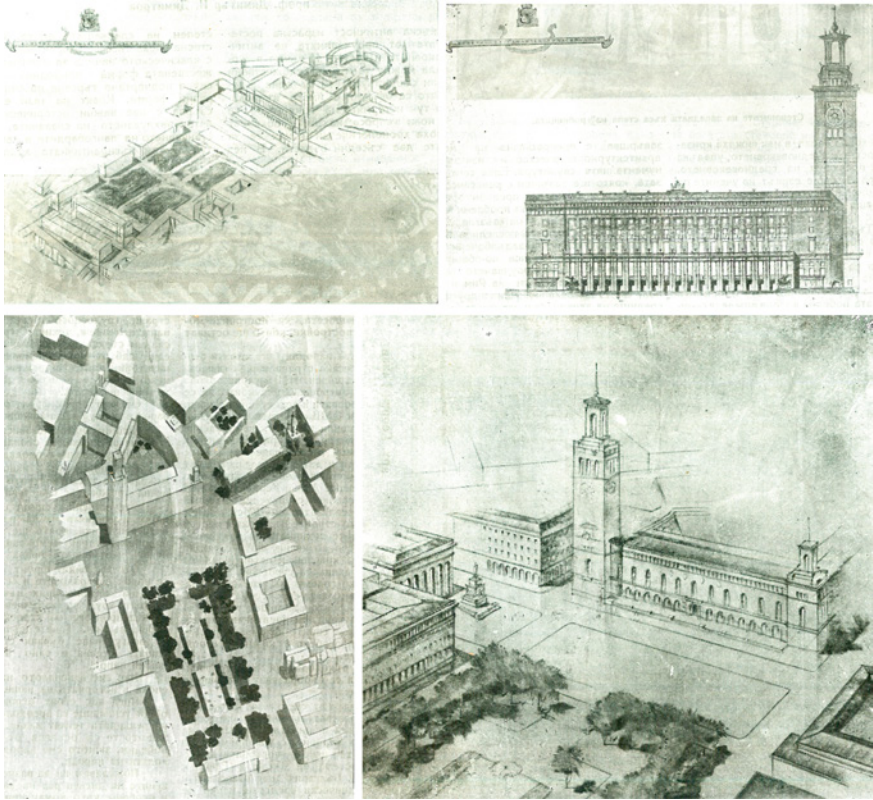
FIGURE 1   *Purchased projects in the competition for a plan of the center in 1947.*
             ARHITEKTURA 10/1947: 4, 5, 9.

plan in 1946 and 1947, none of which, however, produced a winning entry
(see Figure 1). Whereas the first competition combined this planning task with
an assignment for standardized social housing in recognition of the "acute prob-
lem" of housing shortage,[1] the later competition programs limited their briefs
to the center. The budget absorbed in the cycle of competitions increased from
one contest to another, reaching a lump sum of 3,175,000 leva,[2] compared to the
modest expenses of 160,000 for the housing designs.[3] Meanwhile, the popula-
tion of Sofia was growing at a high rate, reaching an increase of 53% in the five
years following the coup, and housing construction lagged behind to the extent
that newly built units could accommodate only 10% of the newcomers, not

1   DA-Sf, f. 65, op. 1, a.e. 70, l. 390–391.
2   DA-Sf, f. 65, op. 1, a.e. 77, l. 36–39; DA-Sf, f. 65, op. 1, a.e. 84, l. 451–456, 487–489; DA-Sf, f. 65,
    op. 1, a.e. 91, l. 528–534.
3   DA-Sf, f. 65, op. 1, a.e. 82, l. 316–317.

accounting for the unresolved housing needs of locals.[4] The funding siphoned into the planning of the center came from a special budget for the reconstruction, earmarked partly for the implementation of the master plan. Yet, in the outer residential districts planning was long postponed, leading to a systematic decline of construction permits during a worsening housing shortage.[5]

What contributed to the disproportionately high expenses of the competitions for the center were not only their multiple stages, but also the participation of foreign experts in the jury committees to add prestige to the assignment. As Soviet experts declined to join the proceedings,[6] international expertise was provided by other fraternal countries. Yet, in contrast to the unconditional acceptance granted to Soviet recommendations, the input of their colleagues from elsewhere remained largely disregarded. Indeed, the two honorary guests, Josip Seissel from Zagreb and Alois Mikuškovic from Prague, both warned against the overloading of the central square with representational uses and political functions (Seissel 1947: 12; Mikuškovic 1948: 20–22). Mikuškovic even advanced a proposal to develop the central boulevard running through Ninth of September Square into a "traditional promenade" and preserve the palace. However, the prototype sought to be reproduced in Sofia was Moscow's Red Square—parade grounds intended to host marching proletarian columns saluting their leaders rather than the evening strolls of carefree urbanites.

As the administratively guided transfer of knowledge privileged Soviet expertise, the final plan for the center of 1948 was elaborated with the assistance of Soviet specialists (Tonev 1949: 58). Diverging even further from the recommendations of Seissel and Mikuškovic, this plan increased the congestion of political functions around Ninth of September Square by outlining an adjacent assembly around a headquarters for the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP)—hereafter known as the Party House. This centerpiece reflected the recent consolidation of power by the BCP, which had eliminated coalition partners and opposition alike and established a mono-party system of a Soviet type.

Soviet-Styled Landmarks: the Leader Cult and the Leader's Mausoleum

Ever since the adoption of the master plan, Sofia's main square had been designated for monumental redress, yet towards the end of the 1940s it was still awaiting its proper socialist landmark. While the projects for removing the

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4   DA-Sf, f. 65, op. 1, a.e. 379, l. 5.

5   DA-Sf, f. 65, op. 1, a.e. 75, l. 292–293.

6   DA-Sf, f. 65, op. 1, a.e. 70, l. 406–13.

former palace were time and again dismissed in the lengthy series of architectural competitions, an unexpected political event occurred that would effectively transform the scenography of Ninth of September Square. On July 2, 1949, Georgi Dimitrov, party leader and prime minister, died. The following day, a mourning session of the Politburo was summoned, at which the party's top brass decided to preserve Dimitrov's body in a mausoleum, as had been done with Lenin. The decision to emulate the Soviet prototype was no doubt approved in advance by the Soviet leadership, as the top-secret embalmment had to be performed by the scientific team from the laboratory of Lenin's Mausoleum. In the years ahead, the maintenance of the body and the building installations remained entirely dependent on the goodwill of the Soviet authorities.

Due to the uniqueness of this type of monument and the political rituals of charismatic legitimation revolving around it, the scientific gift of the embalmment was a rare privilege to a fraternal country reaffirming its bond of friendship with the USSR and signaling its belonging to the closest circle of Soviet allies. A monument of the highest order, the Mausoleum was a material incarnation of the leader cult engineered by Stalin and then inculcated in the people's democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. Within this ritualistic culture, the key personalities of the cult, Lenin and Stalin, were joined by national leaders who nurtured their own subsidiary cults emphasizing first and foremost their status of loyal disciples (Rees 2004: 19). In the Soviet sphere, Georgi Dimitrov's Mausoleum was the first replica of Lenin's, followed later by several others, most notably those of Klement Gottwald, Ho Chi Minh, Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung (and more recently Kim Jong Il).

The Bulgarian Politburo's memorandum on Dimitrov's Mausoleum specified its location on Ninth of September Square and the new building project was expediently commissioned to the Central Architectural Planning Bureau, where architects were mobilized to elaborate alternative designs overnight (Arhitektura 1950: 4). Despite the tight schedule and the lack of any local experience with such a building, which demanded complex technical installations and a thermally insulated chamber, projects were submitted the following morning. A design based on a classical pantheon-shaped structure of 560 m² and a height of 12 m was approved, and its implementation began immediately. Though opting for a different classical shape from that of Lenin's pyramidal mausoleum, the design stayed true to the prototype in size and crucial details. These details included not only the interior arrangement of the chamber but also the frontal tribune outside, which was reserved for the party leadership during mass parades (see Figure 2). This ceremonial use of mausoleums enhanced their symbolic effect whereby the charismatic legitimacy of the party founder resonated through his successors. The leader cult therefore spread

FIGURE 2   *The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov.*
             SOFIYA 10/1959: 4.

concentric circles of legitimacy across time—from the departed leader to his successor—and across space—from the Soviet power center to the satellites. In Sofia, the Mausoleum would become the centerpiece not only of the country's political core, but also of the Soviet-style mass parades staged on key dates of the socialist calendar (Stanoeva 2011).

Upon the approval of the Mausoleum project, its accelerated execution proceeded with the mobilization of hundreds of construction workers who worked around the clock to complete the job in less than a week. Thanks to their tireless efforts Dimitrov's body was laid to rest on July 10, 1949, eight days after his death. This feat inspired an entire propaganda genre highlighting the Mausoleum's builders. Their broadcasted story provided an additional source of popular legitimation by ascertaining the dedication of the proletarian masses to Dimitrov's legacy through their laborious efforts. Heroization

of labor was yet another political value transplanted from the USSR, where work was averred a fundamental principle of the new society, ingrained in the Soviet constitution of 1936. Hailed by mass media as setting an example similar to that of Stakhanovites in factory production, the construction workers on the Mausoleum's building site were celebrated as "heroes of labor": almost a hundred among them were awarded medals and more than a thousand cash prizes.[7] Although the chief architect of the building was decorated with gold, it was the fervor at the construction site that produced a metaphorical image of the struggle to build socialism, and not the expert's meticulous work at the drawing board.

Moreover, as indicated by a confidential governmental decree from the time when the Mausoleum's construction was coming to a close, its design was considered "provisional" and the architectural bureau had to elaborate an entirely new project in the months after the official opening.[8] The new project, however, was rejected because of the danger of damaging the basic structure.[9] A follow-up internal decree of July 1950 reduced the required design revision to minor changes in the exterior with the argument that the current look of the Mausoleum had "already been deeply comprehended by our entire nation with its stern and simple forms."[10] This decision was apparently based on a concern for preserving the myth of the heroic speedy construction rather than on a high appraisal of the architectural qualities of the existing building, as the government argued that a more elaborate reworking "would cause a great confusion [...] since the Mausoleum itself was constructed in 130 hours, whereas its final design would take a few years."[11]

The public exposure of all additional works on the Mausoleum's exterior along with the assembly of air-conditioning and other installations in the months after it was declared complete was kept at a minimum, to which end the national counterintelligence service supervised the project.[12] A year later, another confidential resolution requested a brand new revetment for the building, replacing the original white stone with dark red granite—clearly to enhance the resemblance to Lenin's Mausoleum.[13] Despite mobilizing the entire state administration to assist the execution of this high-priority project,

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7   TsDA, f. 136, op. 3, a.e. 251, l. 34–45.

8   TsDA, f. 136, op. 5, a.e. 2052, l. 7.

9   TsDA, f. 136, op. 5, a.e. 1238.

10   TsDA, f. 136, op. 5, a.e. 2052, l. 1.

11   TsDA, f. 136, op. 5, a.e. 2052, l. 8.

12   DA-Sf, f. 3868, op. 1, a.e. 1, l. 3.

13   Ibid., 1.

by 1953 it was dropped because of the insufficient extraction of red granite.[14] Thus, a few years after its much celebrated completion, the Mausoleum was finally actually complete, providing the center of socialist Sofia with its long-awaited emblem.

Sovietizing Institutions: Bureaucratic Centralization of Urban Planning and Architecture

While the monumental embellishment of Sofia's center along Soviet lines was proceeding at two speeds—either blocked in a protracted series of competitions or accelerated to a Stakhanovite construction tempo—the technical cadres in charge of the socialist reconstruction went through an institutional reorganization that was itself styled upon earlier Soviet reforms. With administrative centralization underway, the authority of architects was gradually undermined and subordinated to political accountability.

The first step in this process was initiated immediately after the proclamation of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. In October 1946, the Act on the Organization and Utilization of Technical Cadres was ratified, which effectively eliminated freelance architecture by restricting work licenses to state and municipal bureaus, thus nationalizing employment allocation (DV 1946). This was certainly not the technocratic reform that Bulgarian architects anticipated would elevate their professional status with the advent of socialism. Their optimistic expectation was formulated in a headline publication in the journal of their chamber which conceptualized the "social role of the engineer and the architect" under the new regime as standing at the helm of the technocratic rule that would inevitably rise out of the politically driven transformation (Georgov 1947).

However, at the time when this ambitious manifesto was published, the legal reforms concerning engineering and architecture did not aim at building a technocracy that would take the steering wheel of the national economy but, on the contrary, initiated a process of subordinating these fields to state control and party loyalty. Despite the lobbying efforts of architects' corporations to secure some professional autonomy, their limited and short-term success was the delineation of a narrow niche for private practice that was excluded from public commissioning and served solely private construction (DV 1947: 5). This niche was further contracted as policy transfer from the USSR led to nationalization of land, industry, banking and urban estates at the end of 1947. The last

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14   DA-Sf, f. 3868, op. 1, a.e. 2, l. 1.

blow against the independent standing of architects' associations was a state decree from 1949 that dissolved all of them, reorganizing practitioners into a Soviet-styled professional union under the auspices of the state-run Scientific-Technical Union (STU) (DV 1949). As explained retrospectively by the Politburo, the purpose of this "unionization" was mainly political indoctrination of technical cadres in Marxism-Leninism and the Sovietization of their expertise.[15]

Parallel to the endorsement of "democratic centralism" as a principle of party rule transplanted from the Soviet Union, administrative centralization was imposed not only on all branches of the economy, but also on the architectural and urban planning bureaus with the establishment of the Architecture Directorate at the Ministry of Communal Economy and Public Works (MCEPW) in March 1950 (PINM 1954: 5–7). As stipulated by the new legislation, the minister had the right to nominate, dismiss and reassign technical cadres in all local administrations. Down the chain of command, the chief county architects were mandated to assess not only the professional qualifications but also the political reliability of their subordinates, as well as to raise their "ideological-political level" (ibid.: 15). Technical cadres' political consciousness was trained through a number of workplace-based ideological activities: lectures in Marxism-Leninism, studies of the biographies of Stalin and Dimitrov, political uplifting of the collective, organized participation in mass parades and so forth.

Far from optimizing management over the construction realm, centralized oversight encumbered technical activities with a ponderous system of political accountability. As a large-scale urbanist project with high political stakes and broad participation of institutions, the planning of the Stalinist center of Sofia in the first half of the 1950s was a glaring illustration of the inter-institutional friction stemming from this Sovietization of urbanist practice. This planning enterprise covered Ninth of September Square, where the former Royal Palace was to be replaced by an edifice for the Council of Ministers (CM), and the grounds in front of the Party House, where an entire ensemble of five more buildings had to monumentally frame the square. This so-called "Largo" included ministerial edifices for the two prominent economic sectors, in accordance with the Leninist emphasis on industrialization and electrification, a Central Department Store emulating Moscow's TsUM in showcasing the progress of socialist production, a Representational Hotel for high-ranking city visitors and a dominant structure for the House of Soviets, yet another Soviet replica (see Figure 3).

Similarly to the top-priority project of the Mausoleum, this complex planning assignment was rushed by a tight schedule. The close deadlines increased the pressure on the organizations involved as well as the tensions among them.

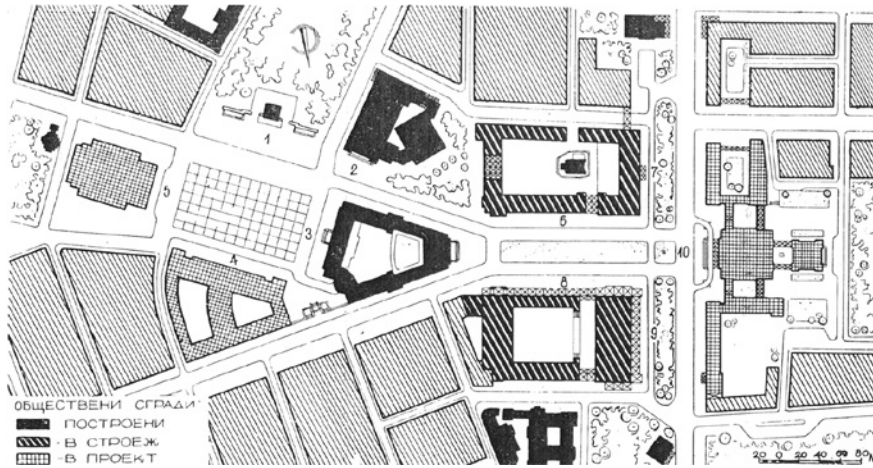15   TsDA, f. 1B, op. 6, a.e. 1645, l. 188.

FIGURE 3   *The plan for Ninth of September Sq. and Largo (1954).*
               ARHITEKTURA 3–4/1954: 50.

This tension ran both vertically, along the chain of command, and horizontally, between partnering architectural teams as well as between their bureaus and construction agencies. In the first place, the process was impeded precisely by centralized oversight, as the CM was extremely slow in giving its approval to submitted plans, so that advancement from one phase to another was interrupted by long intervals of bureaucratic reviewing. This led to the absurd situation of architectural teams elaborating projects for the commissioned buildings ahead of a final decision on the outlines of the two squares and the designated plots for the buildings.[16]

Secondly, the planning process was obstructed by the complicated interactions among sectoral interests within the state apparatus represented by the so-called "investors" for the individual buildings (several ministries and the City Council). Although it was not the investor but the CM initiating the undertaking, the investor nevertheless had to provide funding and technical assistance and to formally approve the architectural project. Since investors had their own plan targets to meet, they lacked an incentive to reallocate resources into additional projects whose elaboration was the responsibility of another branch of the bureaucracy—in this case, the MCEPW. Although not in any position to openly reject an assigned investment project, investors could still delay its implementation simply by withholding their sanction. As summarized by Boris Markov, the head of the MCEPW Architecture Directorate, called the "chief architect of the republic," the planning of Sofia's center confronted

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16   TsDA, f. 136, op. 12, a.e. 1034, l. 1 – 2.

serious travails in the interaction with all other branches of the bureaucracy: from the "complete lack of interest in the execution of the tasks" at the AUPD, to the "indifferent attitude" of the chief architect of the capital, to the non-assistance and delay of approval from all investors.[17]

Despite these external obstacles, the heads of the Architecture Directorate and the mandated architectural bureau were caught in the crosshairs when the government decided to impose sanctions on the delays. In October 1952, both directors were penalized for the "political weakness […] that the deadlines set by the government are generally not met in due time."[18] By that time, the collaboration between the two, Boris Markov and Lyuben Furnadzhiev, had entered a tense phase evident in their mutual attacks of fierce criticism. This strain resulted from yet another specificity of socialist bureaucratism—the Leninist principle of self-criticism that was thoroughly abided by in internal administrative proceedings. In line with this doctrinaire practice, the self-criticizing agency normally admitted to a rather passive shortcoming such as being too tolerant of another agency's mistakes which, for their part, were often presented as a symptom of a deep-seated political misdemeanor rather than mere operative faults. Since the bureaucratic ritual of self-criticism and the imbued criticism was performed in ministerial sessions with the broad participation of subordinate units, mutual accusations created extremely hostile relationships between partnering organizations.[19]

All these bureaucratic setbacks notwithstanding, the projects were submitted on time and the entire Largo ensemble was approved by the government in October 1952.[20] The following year, its construction commenced, outpacing the design of Ninth of September Square, which still lacked final authorization.[21] The latter proved to be too intricate a task, mainly due to the hasty construction of the Party House and the Mausoleum (Petrov 1953: 1–2), which would render this square an urbanistic challenge for decades to come (Stanoeva 2010: 300–310). Also dropped from the construction agenda was the House of Soviets, the expected vertical dominant in the Stalinist cityscape of Sofia, the approved design of which was shelved, most likely for financial reasons.

Despite the timely completion of the architectural plans, the construction itself was slowed down because of incoordination between architects and constructors—yet another systemic effect of centralized commissioning.

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17   TsDA, f. 188, op. 1, a.e. 4, l. 88.
18   TsDA, f. 188, op. 1, a.e. 5, l. 148.
19   TsDA, f. 188, op. 1, a.e. 5, l. 175; TsDA, f. 188, op. 1, a.e. 5, l. 158.
20   TsDA, f. 188, op. 1, a.e. 5, l. 58.
21   TsDA, f. 188, op. 1, a.e. 10, l. 155.

Within its division of labor, where each agency advanced the fulfillment of its own plan rather than the final product, there seemed to be little concern about the overall construction process, since accomplished work was reported based on fragmented technical tasks. Very rarely did architects supervise the execution of their plans or even visit the construction site, therefore, construction mistakes often went unnoticed. By the beginning of 1955, when the deadline for the construction of the Largo had just passed, there were a number of technical problems identified at the construction site for which the planning bureaus and the construction companies were blaming each other, while investors were raising complaints about the delay, despite their own non-assistance.[22] However, the architectural outlook of the ensemble had been already asserted as a standard for monumentalizing central squares throughout the country and the planning process as a norm for managing such projects.

Sovietizing the Artistic Vocabulary: National in Form, Socialist in Content

As the BCP consolidated its grip on power by the late autumn of 1946, when Georgi Dimitrov became prime minister of the newly established republic, the transfer of Soviet norms extended beyond the political system to affect policies of social engineering and cultural production. Within the art realm, this transfer was grounded on the primacy of socialist realism. It was endorsed at the Fifth Party Congress in 1948, when Valko Chervenkov, then Chairman of the Committee for Science, Art and Culture and soon to become Georgi Dimitrov's successor, declared a "systematic fight against modernism and formalism, and against the harmful influences of contemporary West European bourgeois fine art" (BKP 1949: 303). Just like the urbanist vision, this artistic turn reflected the Soviet cultural dogma of Stalin's era. In the Soviet Union, socialist realism was made mandatory in 1932 when the Artists' Union was established (French 1995: 43), which in the next decade would serve as a model for institutional reorganization in Bulgaria.

Insofar as its message was concerned, socialist realism represented "reality seen through the party ideology" (Abel 1987: 143). But what that meant stylistically for visual arts and particularly architecture was quite unclear. Yet, the architectural community, streamlined into state-run bureaus, was denied freedom of interpretation and experimentation with the new art dogma, and

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22   TsDA, f. 188, op. 1, a.e. 15, l. 123; TsDA, f. 215, op. 1, a.e. 14, l. 89, 195; TsDA, f. 215, op. 1, a.e. 54, l. 76–8; TsDA, f. 215, op. 1, a.e. 68, l. 116.

instead had to emulate the Soviet inventory. Whereas in literature socialist re-
alism developed an ideologically sound stylistic form of imbuing reality with
the anticipated utopia of communism (Clark 2003), in architecture it resorted
to classical monumental forms—a reference pointing rather to the imperial
past than to the future social order. The monumental architecture defined in
this way was expected to communicate the grandeur of socialist power to the
masses through familiar and easily comprehensible aesthetic means.

Sarcastically dubbed "wedding cake architecture" and described as "left-
wing Classicism" and "red Doric style" (Åman 1992: 55), the architecture of Sta-
lin's era produced signature buildings that in structure and appearance were
hard to distinguish. Their prototype was the Palace of Soviets in Moscow—a
priority project from the early 1930s that never materialized and yet became
a paper emblem of the Soviet capital and a source of inspiration for the post-
war revamping of the capitals of the satellite states. The sketch of the unbuilt
Palace of Soviets was widely publicized as evidence of the superiority of the
socialist system over Western capitalism, printed on dozens of propaganda
posters and displayed along with political slogans during mass parades in the
USSR (Rolf 2009: 612). Its exemplary design was recreated in many "tall build-
ings" along Moscow's central boulevards, most notably Moscow State Universi-
ty. Beyond the Soviet Union, it was copied in large-scale constructions such as
the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw and the Printing House of the Ro-
manian Communist Party in Bucharest—both carrying Stalin's name (Åman
1992: 125–41).

A further guideline for the socialist-realist architecture was Stalin's exhorta-
tion for art that is "national in form, socialist in content." However, this too did
not carry much clarity, as one of the Bulgarian architects would exclaim dur-
ing a meeting at the ministry: "It is true that architecture should be national
in form and socialist in content but we, the architects, have not seen it in its
actual material appearance."[23] Whereas the "national form" pointed to the cul-
tural legacy of the past, the "socialist content" remained as vague as socialist
realism itself. Furthermore, the reinvention of past national traditions raised
complicated questions about their own political context and connotations—
ultimately, about the compatibility of bygone periods with the political and
social ambitions of socialism.

In Bulgaria, the discovery of architecture "national in form, socialist in
content" largely relied on the inventory of vernacular construction tradi-
tions compiled in the interwar period. Whereas the source of inspiration for
national architecture back then had been chauvinist proclivity (Stanoeva 2014:

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23   TsDA, f. 188, op. 1, a.e. 6, l. 288.

187–201), it was now resurrected within the frame of socialist internationalism, the ideological catchword in consolidating Central and Eastern Europe after World War II into a geopolitical bloc under Soviet control. The paradoxical mix of national forms and presumably internationalist content can be understood only in relation to the ideological confrontation with the Western camp: "To understand the word *national* as used in *national form*, we have to appreciate that the word is the antithesis of *cosmopolitan*, and that the latter word, in the official usage of the Soviet Union and the people's democracies, led nearly automatically to the use of other words: 'imperialist,' 'capitalist,' 'the Anglo-American warmongers,' and so on" (Åman 1992: 117). The preoccupation with signature buildings that would placard the commitment to socialist internationalism in the representational centers of the fraternal countries disturbed the efforts of postwar reconstruction in many major cities which had suffered war destruction by diverting scarce resources into monumental projects (Kulić 2014: 129–134). Sofia was no exception and, within its postwar reconstruction, the Largo ensemble was highlighted as a flagship of socialist urbanism that would embody and hereafter represent the principles of the new architecture.

In the early 1950s, when this gigantic project was on the drawing board, both tenets—applying Soviet methods and inventing national aesthetics—caused great confusion among architects and exposed their vulnerability to party diktat. On the one hand, the insufficient adherence to Soviet guidelines was perceived as dangerously close to "cosmopolitanism in architecture" and the "corrupting influences of decadent formalistic currents in West European architecture."[24] On the other hand, the emulation of Soviet models point for point—"without putting anything of oneself into it"—was also treated as a deplorable error.[25] Thus, architects found themselves under the double pressure for emulation without imitation, lacking any clues how to navigate the thin line between ideological veracity and aesthetical cliché. In this effort, the minister provided them with the mystified rule that "one may copy but not so much."[26]

Facing the dilemma of political dissidence for diverging from the Soviet model or a creative failure for emulating it too diligently, the architects involved in the Largo's planning naturally opted for the second vice and produced a close imitation of Soviet examples (see Figure 4). The prescribed national forms were mechanically applied onto the otherwise identical neo-classical facades in an eclectic mixture imitating Bulgarian heritage from several past

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24   TsDA, f. 188, op. 1, a.e. 5, l. 6.

25   TsDA, f. 188, op. 1, a.e. 5, l. 147.

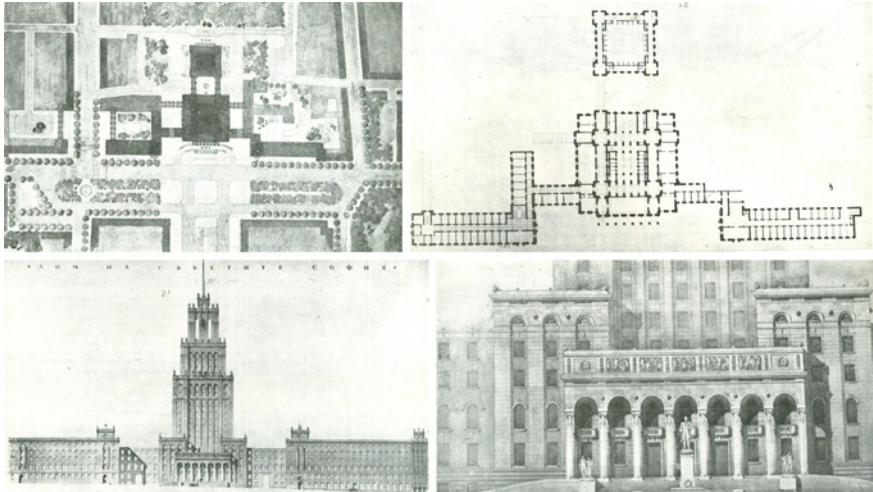26   TsDA, f. 188, op. 1, a.e. 11, l. 102.

FIGURE 4   *The accepted plan for the House of Soviets (1954)*
             ARHITEKTURA 5–6/1954: 1–3.

epochs which were not necessarily consistent with socialist aspirations, but
represented historical achievements of Bulgarians: mainly, the medieval peri-
od of the independent Bulgarian kingdom prior to the Ottoman conquest and
the Revival period under the late Ottoman Empire, when the cause of national
liberation was pursued. Even though authored by separate architectural teams,
the integrated buildings formed a monotonous and uniform framework for the
ensemble, an effect that was reinforced by their matching exterior materials.

Ironically, the ensemble of the Largo, which the chief architect of the re-
public described as incarnating "Stalin-inspired care for the people" (Markov
1953: 9), was completed in the years after Stalin's death. Moreover, it was in-
augurated shortly after the succeeding Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev,
launched a process of de-Stalinization with his "secret speech" denouncing
Stalin and especially his "cult of personality" at the 20th Congress of the CPSU
in February 1956. In domestic policy, this turn led to increased attention to the
material needs of the people—a positive approach of social mobilization that
was meant to guarantee the regime's popular legitimacy after the rejection of
Stalin's methods of political repression.

De-Stalinization in Party Politics and Urbanism

From the mid-1950s onwards, de-Stalinization and the consequent shifts in par-
ty ideology under Khrushchev's rule led to profound changes in the urbanist

realm. The revision of previous conventions affected urban planning, which increasingly responded to more pragmatic considerations related to urban form and function, as well as public architecture, which opted for utilitarian designs in terms of style and types of buildings. Slower than the reworking of the art canon, institutional reform was also implemented, facilitating a relative emancipation in the professional status of architecture and urban planning.

Among other turbulent changes, de-Stalinization triggered a revision of the architectural canon. The decreed deadline for the completion of the Largo in Sofia coincided with a Soviet conference on construction convened in Moscow in 1954 with the political objective of determining a new course in this realm. Its conclusions, conveyed in a governmental Resolution on the Removal of Exaggerations in Planning and Construction, sent a clear signal to Bulgarian architects to abandon the "hitherto prevailing tendency towards an erroneous approach in the use of classical legacy and excessiveness," as explained by Lyuben Tonev (1955: 3). The Stalinist style was discredited as contradicting the very spirit of socialism. This was articulated in an op-ed on the cult of personality in architecture in Bulgaria's leading architectural journal *Arhitektura* which concluded that the "architectural forms of the slave-owning society and feudalism [...] with their monumentality of stone and their coldness were in overt discrepancy with the vitality of the socialist system, with its deep humanism" (Arhitektura 1962: 3).

The compositional principles of the Stalinist cliché were now stigmatized, which rendered previously acclaimed models such as Warsaw's Palace of Culture and Science examples of an erroneous path (Tonev 1960: 4). Condemned was not only their grandomania but also the over-expenditure of financial and labor resources in their construction. In line with this verdict, a Commission for the Removal of Excesses and Luxuries in Construction was set up in Bulgaria, duplicating a newly established Soviet agency, to review plans of public and residential buildings. While the neo-classical design was exposed as an echo of "feudalism", the prestige of socialist realism in Bulgaria remained intact. Its guidelines were instead redefined with an emphasis on functionality and expedience, as well as humanism—still an antipode of Western art and its "aimless creativity unconstrained by any criterion" (Trufeshev 1978: 44).

In the first years of de-Stalinization, architects were commissioned predominantly public buildings of social and cultural use rather than emblems of power, and an unprecedented number of hospitals, schools and local cultural centers were built (Trufeshev 1968: 201). The value attached to minimizing construction costs urged architects and engineers to devise new methods under the umbrella terms of "standardization" and "typification"—that is,

FIGURE 5   *Second-prize projects for the House of Soviets in the competition for a plan of the center in 1963*
ARHITEKTURA 3/1964: 6, 20–21.

multiplying unified design types both in public construction and in the mush-rooming housing estates. Although in the 1960s political monuments and head-quarters returned to the agenda of Sofia's socialist reconstruction—especially, the pending House of Soviets and cm seat—their projects never approached the imposing monumentality of the Party House or the ritualistic solemnity of Georgi Dimitrov's Mausoleum. On the contrary, the new designs were aligned with the guidelines of functionalism and non-ornamentation, a shift particu-larly visible when the plans for the House of Soviets before and after 1956 are compared (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

As urban planning was also catching up with the spirit of post-Stalinism, comprehensive efforts for the socialist reconstruction of Sofia's center were relaunched with a competition for a detailed plan in December 1963, this time with an international call. The competition brief reflected the new priority placed by domestic policy on the material needs of the population. Therefore, the future plan had to contain a commercial zone to improve consumer pro-vision and "endue the image of the center with more modern features," and monumental embellishment was diversified to include greenery, illuminations and street furniture, thus raising the everyday attractiveness of public space (BIKSGNS 1964: 58). Public space was not stripped from political messages, but these were articulated in a more subtle way as the new central sites were meant to showcase the success of the command economy and the utopian promise

of mass prosperity. Their rational socialist design, on the other hand, was intended to mold socialist consumerism as a sensible, politically conscious and collectivist behavior.

The competition attracted entries mostly from abroad—both from Soviet bloc countries and Western Europe. This foreign participation was matched by an international jury composed of experts from the USSR, the GDR and Poland, joined also by a representative of the International Union of Architects (BIKSGNS 1964: 59). The latter invitation was possible thanks to Khrushchev's concept of peaceful coexistence with the West, which also impacted the paths of knowledge transfer. Although the architectural contest of 1963 did not produce a winning project, its guidelines would direct the endeavors of urban planning through the decade.

Towards the end of the 1960s, architects began to articulate an even more pragmatic vision for the development of Sofia. An opening for their critical reevaluation of the socialist city model was the increased autonomy of their professional niche. In 1965, the Union of Architects in Bulgaria (UAB) was established as a successor of the architectural section of the STU. Despite retaining the status of a state union, the secession from the larger technical union strengthened the organization's professional authority and sense of mission. Its self-awareness of public relevance was further fueled by the symbolic recognition granted to architecture with the establishment in 1966 of the Ministry of Architecture and Public Works, the first ministry in socialist Bulgaria to included architecture in its title.[27] This double inauguration was interpreted as a "profound turning point in the public opinion's perception of the activity of architects" and a first step in forging a power alliance, wherein the UAB would serve as the right hand of the ministry.[28] Moreover, in line with recent economic reforms of decentralizing the planning process that were experimented with across the bloc, the UAB was granted rights of independent economic activity by negotiating its contracts with state, local and foreign investors.

Although in the coming years the sectoral administration would more often than not ignore the Union's advice and thus deny it the authority it expected to hold,[29] architects' growing self-perception of expertise encouraged the UAB to develop a critical stance on urbanist issues and seek civic outreach, thereby asserting itself as a public tribune of deliberation on proposed plans. What gave

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27   TsDA, f. 77A, op. 1, a.e. 3, l. 6.

28   Ibid., 51.

29   DA-Sf, f. 2438, op. 1, a.e. 42, l. 79–81.

architects the impetus to voice dissent was not only the relative corporative autonomy they had achieved, but also the pragmatist spirit of Brezhnev's era, when utopian aspirations were toned down.

The UAB's most vocal criticism in the late 1960s concerned the continuous destructive thrust against the pre-socialist architectural legacy, including the still intact palace, and the neglect of the deteriorating environmental conditions in Sofia. With regard to architectural preservation, many established architects started emphasizing not only the cultural value of historical buildings, but also the obsolescence of the iconoclastic approach to the past in light of the advanced stage of socialism that the country had entered.[30] The revanchist obliteration of the "monarchic-bourgeois" heritage was now seen as an act of "cultural nihilism," "architectural brutalism" and "formalistic lurch."[31] This heuristic discourse on the pre-socialist urban fabric blended with emerging concerns about the city's impact on the physical and mental health of residents. Urbanists' awareness was raised about the burdensome effects of monotonous large-scale structures, the damage inflicted by traffic noise and air pollution, the recreational value of pedestrian movement and greenery, and the psychological need for a human scale in the cityscape.

The new urbanist debates stirred recognition that the socialist city might not be an antipode of the capitalist city, and this opened new avenues for the transfer of knowledge. The foreign examples referred to in expert discussions ranged from Amsterdam, Brussels and Stockholm as the "most humane" European capitals, to Paris, London and Tokyo exemplifying an undesirable super-modernist trend.[32] This reassessment was apparent throughout the Soviet bloc—"a declining emphasis on normative and utopian concepts, more attention to actual forms of urbanization processes, the de facto acceptance of the universal nature of urbanization processes" (Musil 2003: 34). This notion of convergence or at least comparability between socialist and capitalist cities made Bulgarian architects reappraise even the bastions of "Western imperialism": "As regards New York, which we consider to be an erroneously constructed city, they make reconstructions and they do them more carefully than us. They are beginning to think much more about the individual than we, who claim that caring for people is paramount for us."[33]

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30   DA-Sf, f. 2438, op. 1, a.e. 42, l. 59.

31   Ibid., 51, 54, 83.

32   Ibid., 54, 89–90, 95–96, 134.

33   Ibid., 136.

Post-Socialist Sofia: Radical Change or Path Dependence?

After the collapse of state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989, the countries in the region went through a profound political, social, economic, and, not least of these, mental transformation. This transformation was particularly visible in cities and especially national capitals, as it affected property rights, administrative procedures, rules of public conduct and patterns of economic development, simultaneously opening up their space for free political expression and private business activities. Whereas the images of civic demonstrations exuded public enthusiasm for change, economic reshuffling produced a far more controversial narrative of "transition," and its outcomes were rarely celebrated with the same enthusiasm. What some have dubbed a localized manifestation of "wild capitalism" (Birne at al. 2006), while others have attributed it to global processes of unchecked neoliberal advance, produced a radical breach in the development path of formerly socialist cities. Yet, despite being framed by essentially different economic models, some urban repercussions of trends before and after 1989 do not stand so far apart, indicating a certain path dependence.

Among the things that the socialist and the post-socialist incarnations of Sofia have in common, an interesting point of comparison are the approaches of authorities to the monumental layer of public space. Creating highly-mediatized footage of the "end of communism," the ruby red star on top of the Party House was removed by helicopter in the autumn of 1990, and nine years later the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov, by then a hollow structure (his remains being cremated in July 1990), was destroyed after week-long detonations (Todorova 2006). Beyond the façade of such symbolic ruptures with the past, their enactment was all but radically different from the socialist style of top-down resolutions on urban issues, disregarding public opinion, professional input or even local decision-making.

In the early 1990s, the then mayor of Sofia, Aleksander Yanchulev, tried to reinstate municipal property rights over the Mausoleum's plot, which had been illegally seized by the central government almost half a century earlier. His multiple letters appealing to the new democratic government fell on deaf ears, so the municipal plan to restore the integrity of the City Garden and to subsidize the construction of social housing by auctioning the Mausoleum's movables was shelved.[34] In the same period, the UAB, now a completely independent professional organization, publicized alternative proposals for creative appropriation of the Mausoleum that would transform the building into

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34   DA-Sofia, f. 65, op. 15, a.e. 34, l. 1–20.

a museum dedicated to the atrocities of the communist regime. As authorities did not back the idea, the former Mausoleum was simply destroyed five years later and until today the void it left is visible in the empty rectangle of partially broken pavement along the frontal axis of Sofia's City Garden.

Whereas the Mausoleum was blown up in a superficial gesture of breaking away from the past, the former Party House, once the cosmetic removal of its communist crown-piece was completed, became a seat of the Parliament of democratic Bulgaria. While these two acts of dealing with the material legacy of socialism seem diametrically opposite, in both of them one can detect striking continuity with the past. If in the Mausoleum's case continuity shines through non-transparent and overtly centralized decision-making, in the latter case it is evident in the literal preservation of the ivory tower of power. The imposing structure of the building and its solemn marble interior, once an expression of Stalin's vision of rule, should now accommodate a very different notion of the relationship between "rulers" and "ruled"—one in which citizens have not only true electoral power but also a say in decisions concerning the common good, and the members of government are civil servants, electable and accountable. To what extent these parliamentary headquarters can convey such a notion or instill it in those who occupy the offices is a challenging question. After all, places are not neutral containers of social life but actively shape and even breed public practices—something that, as shown above, the socialist vision of urban transformation heavily relied on, taking a cue from Marx's dialectical materialism. Their structure and design foster particular behavioral patterns not only of using space but also of interacting with others within it, thus conditioning intergroup positioning, social relations and exercise of power.

To the above examples of continuity in the urban development of Sofia before and after 1989, one can add authorities' vision of collective memory that still adheres to the grand narrative of national history and to the static style of pedestaled monuments, as well as their neglect for the environmental deterioration of the city. The latter, recognized by urbanists in the late 1960s but never consistently dealt with in the decades of socialism and post-socialism, had meanwhile reached an alarming high as Sofia won the trophy for the most polluted capital in Europe.

The concept of path dependence concerns not only the structural preconditioning of problems and solutions by their pursuit in the past, but also the perseverance of social institutions, cultural practices and patterns of organizing life across different historical contexts. In light of all the detected symptoms of path dependence in Sofia's contemporary development, the study of its socialist past is not just a historical exercise but can also provide a compass for

meaningful urban change today that could offset the negative imprints of both the socialist era and the decades of convulsive transition.

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