

**Guest Editorial by Katia Iankova**

## **Communism in plural: legacies for cities in the era of postmodernism**

Cities, the great laboratories of civilisations at all times, have always provided the best conditions for advancements in human civilisation. They are at the same time reflecting all forms of societal variation – from economic foundations to political structures. As sensitive mirrors of human cultures, the human condition is weaved into the city's physical and social tissue. Communism as the historical period was no exception in this regard. It imprinted traces on the city's organisational structure, its pace of life on the mentality of its citizens and on their successes and struggles.

Some of the socialist cities were built *ex nihilo*. Their anatomy followed the communist ideas of comfort, aesthetics and social dynamics. The rest of the vast majority, even those that appeared in earlier historical periods, were transformed under communist rule by different degrees, incorporating in their morphology the ideas of social and gender equality, social accessibility to culture, health and leisure. In all cases, the planned economy and heavy regulations determined the size, the pace and the limitation of urban sprawl and demographic density of these cities. Despite the polemics of the impacts of this regime on the nations leaved in it, still vivid nearly 30 years after the fall of communism, one cannot deny these obvious facts. The citizens in these cities are still walking, on webs of streets and road networks created during the communist period, entire quarters are designed to host citizens often numbering the population of an entire village in the collective buildings called "blocs". They still benefit from the central heating stations providing heat and hot water to these quarters and in many cases to the entire city. Their residents take their infants and toddlers every day to domicile nurseries especially built within walking distance to give equal opportunity to young families and especially to women to work. These are still functioning infrastructures for essential services, without which the life in these cities would be unthinkable today. Schools and administrative buildings with distinctive architecture and ornamentation formed the architectural styles, which were often named after the communist leader who ruled during the heyday of the

architectural fashion – Stalin’s baroque, Hrushciiov’s minimalism. And today, in majority of these communist cities, their citizens are witnesses to the decomposing remains of the near past in front of their eyes – industrial ensembles, monuments and examples of high architectural achievements of this period are disappearing faster than their memories of it.

But the communist era should not be viewed only in the built environment. The people of the communist countries are the bearers of a particular mentality, and an approach to life and things like money and time, competition and camaraderie, work ethic. Older generations still keep their memories of this period, and therefore it is so important to document them before they fade away. It is still possible to explore and document the approaches of communist people towards money, physical time and the concepts of friendship and collegiality – all these concepts being part of the intangible sphere of values of communist people, or perhaps it is better to say, people who lived under the communist regime. During socialism, time is “flowing slower” and is appreciated differently as “time is not necessarily money” – this sense of timelessness fills the literary retrospection of writers reflecting on that period. However, there is a deafening silence within the academic ether, where these themes are barely raised, and neither were they thoroughly researched.

One of the reasons of this missing thread in research is the reluctance of the researchers to carry out these investigations. First and foremost this can be explained by the cautious attitude of the local authors regarding this topic – a feeling of malaise, of shame with the topic installed in the last almost 30 years from the collapse of communism, and due to the very vivid feelings of love and hate, both negative and positive, that are still haunting the collective memory. The loss of communist political and economic system in the ideological “battle of the titans” and the instalment of the “winner” who equated communism with evil regimes and unviable economies provoked feeling of guilt and unease in the post-communist societies. It is important to step back, in order to take a more impartial, more objective look at the history and its implication on societies who lived through the communist regimes. Only in the last

decade, have we witnessed the first articles appear which discussed the communist legacies in relationship with both cities and tourism.

And so, finding it important to discuss, to write about communism and its societal impact, this special issue is dedicated to the communist legacies and their footprint on the city's physical and social fabrics and lifestyle. Through the eyes of the academic city readers, this topic will be linked to the opportunities that these legacies provide to the tourism industry in the urban space. In this collection, various texts have been carefully selected, reviewed and accepted for publication and I must say that I am delighted to present such various and rich approaches and the wide analysis of a range of articles, written by seasoned researchers and emerging academic colleagues. Disciplines such as geography, tourism and heritage management, and curatorship are the canvas of the theoretical frameworks, making the articles extremely interesting to read. The geographical variety of the studied cases here is another asset that the reader will benefit from in this special issue. On the two extremities stands, case studies from countries with current communist regimes such as North Korea and China, whilst at the other end we find discussion about capitalist countries which never experienced a communist *modus operandi* in their governance, but in which the communist and antifascist movement throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were very strong. In between, the majority of the articles shed light on the legacies left by communism in countries where this ideology is no longer governing however has deeply impacted the social dynamic, the economic structure and the infrastructure of these countries.

Two articles related to the heritage representation are forming a steady stream in this theme. Claudia Sima shed light on the unwanted, problematic heritage and the attempt of the political power in Romania to modify the meaning of the tourism promotion, advertising and city branding. Tanija Mihalich's article on one hand proposes a content analysis on the thematic level, both in academic literature and tourist promotional literature with the aim to investigate the degree of interest in these topics and on another hand the presence of socialist/communist themes, or better to

say absence in the East European countries. This comes to confirm one more time the potential of the topic as research field and the opportunities for these countries to highlight their new history, if they wanted to.

The role of the interpretation of the communist heritage in China and its use for the development of the ever more popular red tourism in this country is tackled by Chan and Wall. The evolution of the government's approach towards this heritage is also part of the article and important issues such as the subtle or overt manipulation of the history in the interpretation, and the overall impact of the tourism industry in China in this case is part of the outcomes of this research. Another interesting aspect of the approaches to interpretation is discussed by Zhao and Dallen's article, where the governmental framework, the tourists provenance and onsite attitudes influence the way that tour guides interpret the past.

An interesting and really rare article discussing case studies from the North Korean context is the article of Wang *et al.* shedding light on tourism as tool for patriotic education, where the question is whether the political party will allow the country to open for international tourism and whether tourism will be used to present the best of the country's assets and will be the vector of change for the international image of North Korea.

When one speaks about such complex concepts as ideology and all the consequences resulting out of it, one needs to admit that this is not only a matter of approaching the visible facets of the topic, but also the invisible and difficult to grasp – the people, with their beliefs, actions, behaviour and attitudes. The matter of the interpretation and the imposition through it of the predominant political ideology is a common and relatively well-developed topic, and the article of Ivanov and Achikgezian touches on the feelings of unease or nostalgia by the Bulgarian population during the post-communist period.

A brilliant idea by Adie *et al.* is to investigate the topic in countries which never lived in communist regimes, but have had strong communist movements. Adie et al. had this strong penchant on political sciences discourse to look at the historical personages such as Marx, Rivera, Trotsky, Kahlo and Gramsci related to the almost one century communist movement in countries such as Germany, Finland, Spain, Italy and Mexico. The authors' idea to investigate these movements break the tradition of academics "political loyalty" to capitalist ideology, passing under silence this historical period using it as the most efficient way for historical oblivion. The result of it is an article with an extremely original contribution to the current discussion of cities landscape's representation of intangible communist heritage that can be traced within the fabric of cities.

An important issue that academics need to take in consideration is the safeguarding of the communist tangible and intangible heritage. The approach towards the monuments, socialist architectural schools of thoughts and their representations needs urgent attention as many of them are subject of vandalism, destruction and deterioration, and others simply of purposeful oblivion or unintentional careless. This dichotomy is noticeable in the approach from love to hate in post-communist societies. All nuances from love and nostalgia, passing through indifference, to animosity and hate are represented in the actions or lack of them towards the monumental heritage left by the communist art production. The protection, conservation, the proliferation of museums of socialist art or retro museums stands on the one hand, where the nostalgia is the driving force for their protection. And on the other hand, we witness the purposeful destruction and vandalism such as the bombed mausoleum and the multiple time vandalised monument of the Soviet Army in Sofia, Bulgaria. In between like a marsh is the static and silent agreement of the society of relinquishment and oblivion of this heritage - be it residential and industrial, monumental and infrastructural - which made it into the ghostly ruins of an époque glorified in the immediate past. And this heritage in different stages of decay can be observed while travelling across Georgia, Romania, and Ukraine, Bulgaria and Moldova, for example. It is not for first time in history that we witness this type of societal attitude, the change

of one époque to another and one regime to another always led to similar practices, let us only remember the Decay of Roman Empire in the ancient world and its replacement with the arrival of the Middle Ages with its new people and civilizational models, the switch between Monarchy and Republic in the revolutionary France led to the destruction of the Bastille as symbol of the old order, the destruction of Norman religious heritage with the new Anglican church as the only denomination established by the king in Medieval England. However, what is new here is the speed. We never witnessed such an accelerated process of decomposition or destruction. Post-communist societies are so eager to erase it, demonise it or diminish its importance in their respective countries' historical timeline. And therefore, it is so important to save of what is left, seeing the value of it, postponing its fatal faith to a distant future where the society would be in position to take a more impartial and objective look at it.

It would be wrong in my view to discuss communism in singular. Rather, more rightfully it should be to talk about it in plural. There are as many communisms, as there are countries that have lived through it. All countries are not the same, they have different histories, cultures and their interpretation of it, and the execution of this ideology took different flavours and colours in all of them. The same goes when we talk about tourism development under these regimes – the types, the organisation and the significance of the tourism industry in their respective economies had different role in all of these countries. Despite the attempt to impose a uniformed ideology, we could not imagine in the same basket the Romanian communism under Ceausescu dictatorship with the “softer” version of the neighbouring Bulgaria, we cannot compare the insular Cuban communism with Havana cigars, rum and samba with their counterpart of North Korea's strict Asian discipline. And Russia, we cannot compare with anything else, even only because of the fact that this is the country implemented and spread around Marxist ideology across the half of the globe. Russia, is this “thorn country”, if I may use this term from Samuel Huntington's book “The Clash of Civilizations?” which is also in my view the only ex-communist state that is not ashamed of its communist past, and assumes with dignity its history including its 70 years duration of communism. In Russian collective memory, the communist

period will be forever engraved in a symbiosis with the Second World War years and the Soviet victory against fascist invasion on its territory. It will be impossible for Russian people to deny Soviet communism as this would be to deny the more than 20 million victims that this country assumed, and so often in the public discourse and the collective memory Soviet times and the Second World War times are inextricably linked.

But this plurality of communisms can be viewed not only on geographical principles but on a historical timescale even when this is limited to the boundaries of a single country. The communism in Russia, for example, in its very first steps of 1920s-1930s is not the same as it was in its later stages. It is difficult to compare the enthusiasm and freedom in flourishing art and science of the 1920s – early 1930s with the later stages of stagnation and of war disaster of 1940s, which deeply wounded the country, the raise of new forces and the massive (re)construction of the country in the 1950s, the new wave of enthusiasm of 1960, followed by another cycle of slow maturation of 1970s and quiet stagnation of the 1980s. This had its impact on the cityscapes, the societal moods of cultural effervescence and despondency. This obliges us, as researchers, to wear our toga of objectivity and put on our glasses of multidimensional vision to try analysing this era in its full complexity.

It is important to revisit the urban literature, which treats the city under communist era whom conceptualisation is leaning towards the negative impacts of it on the entire nations and urban communities. In the west, the favourite and overexploited topics are the Gulag concentration camps; the repressions; the deficit of goods; the corruption and favouritism in the high levels of the communist parties; the ban on travel in the non-communist world; the ideological censure of the hampered freedom of speech. These are topics where scholars worked for years and established a “dark” image of communism. However, when asking ordinary people from the very same ex-communist countries, they will speak about this period with nostalgia. And this striking ambivalence between the intellectualisation on behalf of the predominant academic stream of thinkers and the peoples’ view is important to be acknowledged

and analysed. This dichotomy was captured and presented by the East-European scholars in their articles of this special issue, namely, Ivanov and Achikgedzian, Mihalich and Sima. This dichotomy of the communism scholars' results invites us to take a closer look, delve deeper in this historical period and propose a more multifaceted approach to coming up with new ideas and concepts.

Another promising track of research is the comparative analysis of the coastal and mountain resorts planning, spatial organisation and architectural design in socialist and capitalist world. Returning to the tourism and focussing on Europe, the 1950s was the period of the beginning of the long period of booming coastal and mountains resorts construction (Black Sea, Baltic) in the socialist countries a period that slowed down in the 1970s. This process coincided with the similar phenomenon in the capitalist countries – the massive (over)construction of the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts. While the first had happened in total state control and execution of the projects as a whole idea/concept, in a planned manner with strict regulation of the use of space, the case in the capitalist world ended in over construction, especially on the French Riviera and Spanish coast where numerous developers were targeting maximum profit per metre square, following the free market logic and with little state regulation, suffocating the natural environment and over reaching the carrying capacity of the littoral. Later, the French urbanists will recognise this as a mistake, however once constructed, the concrete remain for centuries. The communist countries will be accused in this regard in an authoritarian approach and lack of freedom, but with orderly planned space and sustainable approach to the environment. And yet, while debating which urban development is more viable, imagine one without over population, simply because is strictly controlled and with no street poverty and mendicants simply because is forbidden. We still can see these in North Korea, Vietnam or China as living examples of communist cities. Which urban development model is better? Looking at the city as a living organism, one can only give its preferences by defending the merits of one model over another, as both are extremely interesting to study comparatively and very different in terms of their organisational logic, pace of development, urban problems and aesthetic beauty. Yet,



it is extremely difficult to ignore the previous historical layers of the urban anatomy, which would make the task of academics a pure piece of philosophical art, if they succeed to do it. In this vein of thoughts, it will be fruitful to research in comparative perspective the urbanism of the two regimes – capitalist and communist – which existed in parallel, hopefully before this is only possible to do from a historical perspective.

I will not touch here on the extremely interesting phenomenon of health and spa resorts, part of the social and domestic tourism, as unique phenomena offered by the communist societies to their citizens, neither I will touch in depth on the terminological variety of the very same regime called socialism mainly by the East-European academics and communism by their western counterparts – both meaning the same period of time and both terms accepted in the current literature without clarity whether one or the other term will prevail as universally accepted by the academic community. I leave this to future discussion since the topic of communism and its forms, legacies, impacts are limitless.

I will hasten to finish this editorial, wishing to all researchers interested in this topic to deploy their efforts in untested waters, as the topic of communist legacies, cities and tourism is a vast, undiscovered territory for promising prolific academic writing based on unexplored concepts and empirical data waiting to be collected.