

REINVENTING EASTERN EUROPE: IMAGINARIES, IDENTITIES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

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The book, divided in 10 chapters, is related to the analysis of the political, economical and social transformations recorded in the post-socialist period, including reconstruction projects of urban identity of different European former communist countries. Particular attention is paid to projects for the conversion of industrial buildings and sites, which are becoming at the present stage symbolic elements of the traditional industrial areas in decline. Most of the previously built industrial units are affected by the aggression of other types of activities that have practically replaced the industrial ones, as a result of the changes in the economic markets. The approach is all the more interesting as it is realized from the perspective of the memory of places, the abandoned industrial buildings being considered dense places of history and collective memory (Ambrosi 2008), and by spatial representation the factory is considered a mnemonic space (Tamboukou, 2016, p. 39).

Chapter I, entitled "The angel of nostalgia trapped between East and West", it represents an introductory study of historical and political changes that have influenced the evolution of Eastern European countries under the influence of Western European countries. The author, Marta Fernández Soldado, analyzes this evolution that has generated numerous negative effects for the East European countries, calling on a series of works belonging to authors from former Yugoslavia (Andrzej Stasiuk, Dubravka Ugrešić) or Ukrainian authors (Yuri Andrukhovych). If in the case of Andrzej Stasiuk his book is based on his impressions and observations following a trip to several European countries, Dubravka Ugrešić relates her perception of the geographic space that resulted from the fragmentation of Yugoslavia. She finds deeply disappointed by the changes in cultural landscape, but also from economic and social point of view. Marta Fernández Soldado abstracts from the beginning the topic, using in the title of the chapter a metaphor to refer to one of the authors who wrote about the transformations registered in the Eastern part of Europe under the direct influence of Western European countries before the communist period. She considers Petar Petrović an "angel of history and nostalgia, trapped between East and West, past and future, unable to pause for an instant" (p. 16) and "piece together what has been smashed" (Petrović quoted by Fernández Soldado, 2019, p. 16) because "the storm of progress will not allow hom to" (Fernández Soldado, 2019, p. 16).

The second chapter suggestive intituled "Ukraine's East-West Regional division", belongs to the author Zhanna Mylogorodska, in which two different orientations are reflected, one the one hand the Ukrainian-speaking people who are pro Europe, and on the other the Russian ethnic population who is inclined towards the Russian policy. The author considers that this division constitutes part of the global and East-West dichotomy. This difference of opinion was "exploited" politically before and during the Orange Revolution, and subsequently it led to the annexation of Crimea by Russia. At the same time, the author presents the situation of Ukraine referring to regions using the theory based on strategic essentialism, term that describes an important concept in postcolonial theory, introduced in 1980 by the Indian literary critic and theorist, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This concept it refers to a "strategy that nationalities, ethnic groups or minority groups can use to present themselves, to bring forward their group identity in a simplified way ("essentialize" themselves) to achieve certian goals" (p. 23).

Based on the analysis of the history of the regions of Ukraine, the author considers that this division from the present has older roots. The eastern part of Ukraine, located on the left bank of the

Dnipro River, was dominated by the Russian Empire since the 17th century and afterward by the Soviet Union. The central part of the country was under the influence of Russia following the Polish partitions in the second half of 18th century. The regions located in the southern part of the country were taken over by Russia after the Russian-Turkish wars at the end of the 18th century. Western regions were under the Polish and Lithuanian rule since the 14th century, then those regions were dominated by Russia, except the westernmost ones (Eastern Galicia, Zakarpattia and Northern Bukovina) were under the domination of Habsburg Empire from 1772 to 1918. Most of Western part of Ukraine was under the influence of Poland again after the WWI, and after the WWII was under the Sovietic influence. However, Western Ukraine is less influenced by Russian culture and Soviet legacies. Although the entire population has voted for Ukraine's independence, since 1990 the Western and Eastern parts of the country are two geographic regions "separated and internally homogeneous entities" (Zhurzhenko quoted by Mylogorodska, 2019, p. 26), which represent a barrier from entering the European Union and NATO.

Each of two regions has a polarizing city: for the Western region (Eastern Galicia) Lviv has a symbolic role of the capital city, and for the Eastern region Donbas the symbolic capital is Donetsk. An important industrial area developed since the nineteenth century, Donbas received the name from the Donets basin, being considered a major coal area for the Soviet Union. In communist societies, industrialization was a process that supported development, so that special status of Donbas was also presented under the popular formulation: "Donbas feeds the entire country" which originated among miners and was also popular in independent Ukraine. Eastern Galicia is the region that was not under URSS domination until WWII, over time being loaded with myths and symbolism, so it became an antipole space to Donbas. From the perspective of Russian propaganda, this region is viewed as the destructive of nationalism. From the perspective of Ukrainian people, Eastern Galicia is the cultural center of Ukraine, "its cultural Piedmont".

Chapter 3 represents an interesting study of Stefana Djokic, which is related to the cultural encounters and the role of art in Cold-War diplomacy in Yugoslav-US relations between 1961-1966. During the 60s, culture was often, sometimes unwittingly, at other times intentionally, infused with the politics of the Cold War. The neutral policy of the Communist President of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, to the Soviet policy, attracted the attention of USA which made great efforts in exercising political and cultural influence in this state. As a result, Yugoslavia became the very first communist country to display American art (eg the exhibition Modern Art in the United States). This exhibition was the partially a political tool of the US government, in a moment when Yugoslavia removed some of the ideological barriers that characterised other East European countries. Several transnational exhibitions were organised across Yugoslavia, mostly in three Republic capitals (Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana). The communist leader of Yugoslavia practiced a "Third Way" politics strongly impacted on cultural development and created a unique environment in which the Yugoslav people were exposed to both American and Soviet culture. Another example is the second exhibition of modern US art, "American Vanguard Painting" opened in Belgrad in 1961, where were exhibited 84 major paintings of some artists Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, etc. This exhibition was organised by Jerome Donson, fulltime museum directorship and a Rockefeller Fellow at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) and worked on the international program, arranging travelling exhibits. He was selected by the US State Department and US Information Agency to direct the American Vanguard exhibit based on action painting which traveled widely through Eastern Europe and major European capitals (Vienna, London, Salzburg, Belgrade). Yugoslavia was not any more receptive to American art, but also assumed an active role of the international art scene. This exhibition was organised upon the request of the Yugoslav Government for a "slow devoted particularly to American Abstract

Expressionism" (p. 40). The author of the chapter mentions, however, that in press of the time there were editorials that criticized this exhibition of American art. Dragoslav Djordjević's review was published in the paper *Borba*, a well-known political paper and the voice of Tito's party. Djordjević labelled the Abstract Expressionist and Neo-Dada works: "simpler, limited and poorer" than its predecessor MAUR in 1956, further criticising it for neglecting American realist painters: "We lament that we have been deprived the works of Ben Shahn, Jack Levine, Hyman Bloom, Morris Grave and others" (p. 42). It is surprising why the art critic who wrote for the communist party paper criticized this art exhibition that was organized at the request of the Yugoslav government. Stefana Djokic is of the opinion that this happened against the backdrop of close ties between art and the shifting politics during that period. At the same time, the author explains that this episode illustrates the difficulty of Yugoslavia's position between East and West. Although Tito has repeatedly criticized the abstract art, considering it as "unacceptable foreign implant", incompatible with "our socialist ethic", calling it an "imposter" in galleries and museums in Yugoslavia, Ljubljana hosted the 5th Biennale of Graphic Art (June 9 - September 15 1963). The Biennale was considered by the international art world as being one of the world's most renowned art events. The Ljubljana Biennale awarded the first prize to American painter, Rauschenberg, for his *Accident*. This was Rauschenberg's very first European award, followed by the first prize at the Venice Biennale (1964). The Ljubljana Biennale din 1963 proved the ability to cross geo-political borders by combining artists and audiences from Eastern and Western Europe, the USA and the Third World, in which 340 artists participated, from 42 countries, across all continents.

On the other hand, the Yugoslav Government began to promote contemporary Yugoslav art abroad in 1950, at the largest contemporary art exhibition at the time: the Venice Biennale (Bogdanović, 2016 quoted by Djokic, 2019, p. 46). Although Yugoslavia had previously criticised the Venice Biennale of 1948 for being capitalist and market-oriented, it returned in 1950 to show the transformation of Yugoslavia after the Tito-Stalin conflict. If at the Venice Biennale of 1950, art works influenced by Socialist Realism were presented in the Yugoslavia pavilion (Bogdanović, 2016 quoted by Djokic, 2019, p. 46), at other editions the Yugoslav government showed a greater openness towards international "standards" of contemporary art, in order to demonstrate that national artists were connected to contemporary international art developments (Bogdanović, 2016 quoted by Djokic, 2019, pp. 46-47). From 1952 onwards, numerous exhibitions of contemporary Yugoslav art were organised through Europe (Italy, France, Great Britain, Germany) and even in USA in 1961 was organised the New Painting From Yugoslavia. The chosen artists mostly represented abstract painting. Sixteen artists were chosen from three Yugoslav Republics (Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia): eg the Croatian artist Edo Murtić represented gestural abstract painting, the Slovenian artist Janez Bernik presented *Ostvo (Island)* a textual abstract painting that integrated organic materials, the Serbian Miodrag Protić displayed Cubic-inspired paintings, etc. This chapter shows how both sides instrumentalised modern art for different political needs and agendas.

Evinç Doğan analyzes the transformation of abandoned industrial buildings in Belgrad using a particular research method (the photographic imagery) to illustrate the temporal and material evolution of industrial buildings. Even through some industrial buildings are now ruins, based on the photographic representations, one can illustrate their materiality which suggest the meaning of the memory, related to the past, at the same time provoking the imagination for possible reuse of industrial buildings. In the first part of chapter 4, the author addresses the theory of the concept of traces and memory. Starting from Jacques Derrida's theory which highlights a metaphorical meaning of the world trace, he identifies two meanings: a "mark of the absence of a presence, an always-already absent present" (Derrida, 1976 quoted by Doğan, 2019, p. 55) and an image that can provide at any given moment a temporal instant of the

snapshot (*instantané*) (Derrida, 2010 quoted by Doğan, 2019, p. 55).

Morphological traces gain symbolic significance through the role in modeling individual and collective imagery. Thus, both the time and space invoke memories, resulting in a phenomenological approach, giving importance to the experience rather than the process. The ruins in the material landscape area are real traces, whereas a photograph of the ruins is an indexical presence "suggestive to the past". The present urban landscapes are marked by the presence of abandoned buildings whose history can be written further through the alternative stories. Abandoned industrial sites are considered places of reified memory that are "articulated and inscribed upon space" (Hell, 2011, p. 231 quoted by Doğan, 2019, p. 57).

The second part of the study is focused on the abandoned industrial buildings in Belgrad. Some examples of industrial buildings selected as case studies were built in a less developed urban periphery. As the city developed in time, the industrial sites have possessed a central position. In the present they still occupy attractive locations in the urban tissue, however being absent from their function and significance. Only a few industrial sites enjoy legal protection, yet without any trace of the old technologies and equipment. Evinç Doğan analyzed important industrial buildings, some of them of considerable age: a first selected industrial area was the one along the Danube: BEKO (Beogradska Konfekcija-Belgrade Clothing Company, Snaga i Svetlost-Old Thermoelectric Power Plant, Bajloni Brewery-Old Beer Brewery, Beogradski Pamučni Kombinat – Belgrade Cotton Factory, Cigлана-Old Brick Factory); the second industrial area is located along the left side of the Sava river, within which 4 industrial sites were studied: Lozionica (Locomotive Depot of Belgrade Railway Station), Milan Vapa Paper Mill, BIGZ (Beogradski Izdavačko-Grafički Zavod – Publishing and Graphics Institution of Belgrade) and Šećerana (Old Sugar Factory).

Evinç Doğan analyzed abandoned industrial sites through a collage of photographs, interpreting them from a sense of place perspective, of how they interact with this environment and how people are affected by being in these places of memory through their emotions, experiences an meaning attached to those places. Also, the author make her analysis through *flânerie*, a term referring to the act of strolling and walking the city associated with leisure, idleness, urban exploration, and modern experience. Photographic documentation of the ruins as images of now is important due to the need to record the objects before they disappear. Comparing old and new photos helps to decode the signs, the differences between then and now and overlay images is the "blurring boundary between the past-present and/or the memory-trace". The author used the composed images by overlaying the old photographs with new ones in order to rethink and reimagine the past and present. Another type of new and controversial visual art is ruins photography that can be linked to the ruin fetish in terms of aestheticizing the space and to some extent commodifying it.

In chapter 5, Arianna Piacentini presents in the first part of the study the complex history of "Macedonian question(s)" in a geographical space fragmented through the history that was subject of conquest and partitions, the population has been target of homogenization and assimilation as a result of forced identification pursued by the dominant group-as for instance, "Serbianization", "Bulgarization" and "Hellenization". The second part of the study is focused on the interpretation of an ambitious project ("Skopje 2014") carried out in the capital city of Macedonia in order to promote the identity of the old Macedonia through the construction of new buildings in neo-baroque and neo-classical style, a new national theatre, government buildings, a triumphal arch called "Porta Makedonia", as well churches, museums, bridges and bronze and marble statues portraying historical and heroic figures. Also, the re-naming of streets and other places after ancient Macedonian figures' also took place. This project is criticised by the many of inhabitants of Skopje because they consider that new buildings and statues have

negatively changed the city's image. Other interpretations from scientific point of view mention to the fact that this project resulted from the desire to refer to an important period in the history of their country and to the prominent figure of Alexander the Great. The project carried out by the national party resulted in the strengthening of the "antiquization" of Macedonia a term used to describe the state-led ethnogenesis of Macedonia and Skopje. The ethnocentric part of the project is reflected not only by the "ancient architecture", but also to the figure of Alexander the Great, considered by both the Greeks and Macedonians as a national ancestor, a central figure to their national narratives. The statue of Alexander the Great, of 22 m high, was erected in the middle of Skopje's central square. The reporting to the ancient roof of Macedonia can be interpreted as a "nation compensation backwardness" due to the fact that population is disappointed by the current socio-economic context marked by economic problems, unsuccessful democracy's consolidation, etc.

Another interpretation of the project is related to the dispute with Greece over the ancient Macedonian past, highlighting the desire of Macedonians to emphasize the elements of national identity.

The Skopje urban renovation project was also analyzed from the perspective of creating a "more European" image to the country and its capital city, making it more attractive to tourists and foreign investors.

In the next chapter, Nebojša Čamprag presents the post-socialist urbanism, highlighting the role of urban megaprojects in urban identity building in Belgrade and Skopje.

After a period of isolation, Belgrade registered after 2000 when Milošević's political regime was replaced by a democratic government, obvious changes in the urban planning through the redevelopment of the port area, which presented riverside neighbourhoods less attractive. The project to transform Belgrade's waterfront has been proposed since the 1970s, but it has not been implemented, because the communist regime has paid more attention to the development of the New Belgrade (planned municipality, today being the central business district of the capital city). The Belgrade waterfront project aimed at the redevelopment of several brownfield areas: after port's privatization, the problem of converting its cargo centre into an attractive neighbourhood called "City on Water" was raised. It was proposed to create a multifunctional complex on the site of the former textile giant "Beko", a pedestrian spiral named "Cloud" proposed by a Japanese architect, linked to ferry, tram and bus terminals, but also to a retail and leisure activities area. In 2015 a new public-private partnership was created following an intense public debate that highlighted the need to change the first project due to the lack of economic viability, lack of control of the social and economic implications, as well the failure to respond to the local urban context.

Later, the controversial "Skopje 2014" urban regeneration project implemented in the capital city of Macedonia is analysed as a result of the construction of buildings (reconstruction of the old theater destroyed during the earthquake in 1963) which, although were thought to be built in architectural styles reminiscent of different historical periods, however the buildings have a modern structure that mimics the old design or imitates some architectural elements of buildings in other cities (eg the new building of the Constitutional Court has some similarities with the Palace of Justice from Rome). So, the project is reflecting an abstracted and modified form of imitation, without concrete historical examples. Other critics of the project are related to the lack of public debate and exclusion of minorities from the programme of the project.

In chapter 7, Francesco Trupia analysis the situation of minorities (Muslim, Romani) in Bulgaria, of the harmonious way of living so far, but disturbed by the changes generated in the "century of terrorism" (ex. a massive migratory flow of Turkish population to Bulgaria as following an unstable regime and internal disorders such as the coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016). The author outlines the

historical legacy of ethnic minority groups with regard to lack of public recognition and political engagement are the major challenges for Bulgaria and other former communist Eastern European countries that are affected by the interethnic tensions.

Jacopo Leveratto presents an original example of an intervention for the rehabilitation of a dilapidated esplanade located in front of the Council's Department of Culture in Chisinau. The purpose of this intervention was to build a new urban identity in a civic area historically dominated by the institutional propaganda and also to restore the sense of a real public space different from that created by the central government. The intervention belonging to artists supported by Oberliht Association consisted in the arrangement of a kiosk located in a corner of the market as a functionalist apartment, free of walls that marked its perimeters. The intervention called 'Open Apartment', consisted in a facade equipped with a small balcony and PVC carpentries, a transversal partition-wall, and a raised platform with outlined pieces of furniture and sanitary equipment, which could be used for different activities such as debates, exhibitions, concerts or projections. By strictly analyzing the artistic intervention, this may seem like a unique and isolated event. The significance of artistic intervention marks the reconstruction of the urban identity in a public space created in another historical stage to be used today for other types of social and cultural activities that those for which it was designed (creating a new sense of civic belonging).

The penultimate chapter is focused on the re-evaluation of a public space of a post-socialist town in Slovenia, Velenje, which was an important industrial center during the communist period. Currently, Velenje is a town promoted both as an important business location and a tourist destination valorising its heritage (modernist architecture, process of aestheticisation and reorganisation of public space). The reorganization of the town was achieved through a local project during the 50-60s when it was a powerful mining center by standards of modernist planning at the initiative of the director of the lignite mine named in 1950 and co-governed by the leadership of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Thus, the new town center was designed by separating the administrative, educational, cultural and recreational buildings. In this project miners' houses were built with higher comfort. The project aimed to create a modern plan modern according to the model of the city garden (buildings placed into green areas with the intention to generate the impression of "a city in a park"). The architectural heritage of the town of Velenje is presented in detail, the author paying attention on aspects of territorial planning that had the role not only to create an aesthetic space, but also useful to its inhabitants. This plan was elaborated by the Austrian landscape architecture, Paul Filipski, who has grouped the administrative, cultural, and educational buildings in central square of the town. The author of the chapter, Daniel Grünkranz, also analyzes the transformation of the public space made recently in Velenje, which aimed at creating a long pedestrian way. The promenade has received a spectacular new surface design by an amphitheatre by the river, a bridge over the Paka River, seating furniture and green areas. The pedestrian area aimed to revitalize some public spaces in the town and play its original character of a "town-in-a-park".

Aleksandar Joksimović elaborates the last study dedicated to the analysis of the urban transformations recorded in several cities from the countries that were part of Yugoslavia during the post-socialist period. The author discusses the modernization of the city of Skopje in the communist period after the material damage caused by the earthquake of 1963, and in the current period the author mentions the project "Skopje 2014". New Belgrade was a planned municipality, built since 1948, opposite old Belgrade. In recent years, it has become the central business district of Belgrade. New Zagreb it was another completely new design city, characterised by its orthogonal and mainly residential buildings. The biggest and most modern museum in the country was built here in 2003. The Croatian Catholic Church occupied several empty spaces in New Zagreb, building a large number of churches by renowned Croatian architects (churches of St. Luke the Evangelist, St. Mateja the apostle and evangelist, etc). The

author also refers to another model of urban expansion in the communist period in Ljubljana by creating the Fužine neighborhood on an empty wasteland. In the present, Fužine is the most populated part of Ljubljana and is very animated by the large number of institutions and events that are organised in order to strengthen the sense of belonging and sense of common purpose despite the national affiliations of the inhabitants.

In conclusion, it can be appreciated that this book presents in a multidisciplinary perspective the transition of the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, transformations analyzed by referring to urban/ artistic interventions, urban extension, abandoned buildings, by referring to models of good practices or controversial projects. The complex approach also aims to relate the transformations in the urban environment in relation to the memory of places and the reconstruction of the urban identity that plays an important role in the urban policies. As the largest dynamics of the urban transformations were recorded in the capital cities, they represent the most frequent case studies.

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