Architecture Publications

Architecture

2014

Architecture in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union

Kimberly E. Zarecor
Iowa State University, zarecor@iastate.edu

Architecture in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union

Abstract

Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are often associated with grey, anonymous, and poorly constructed post-war buildings. Despite this reputation, the regional architectural developments that produced these buildings are critical to understanding global paradigm shifts in architectural theory and practice in the last 50 years. The vast territory of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union covers about one-sixth of the world's landmass and currently contains all or part of 30 countries.[i] Since 1960 other national boundaries have existed in this space, including East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union. Given the region's large size, numerous languages, and tumultuous recent history—communist and authoritarian regimes, democratic revolutions, civil war and ethnic strife, political corruption, prosperity, EU accession, and economic instability—a comprehensive summary of 50 years of architectural developments cannot be achieved in one chapter. Rather than survey individual architects or projects in depth, this chapter instead explores the shared transformation in architectural discourse and practice that resulted from the region's political and economic shift to communism after World War II, and the changes that followed the fall of communism in the 1990s.[ii]

[i] Countries include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, East Germany (now considered Western European as part of a unified Germany), Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

[ii] Scholars use the terms communism, socialism, and state socialism to refer to the systems in these countries. For clarity, communism will be used here. Political scientist Andrew Roberts describes communist countries as "ruled by a single mass party that placed severe restrictions on all forms of civil society and free expression … [had] almost complete prohibition of private ownership of the means of production and a high degree of central planning … [and] were committed to revolution and the massive transformation of existing society." Andrew Roberts, "The State of Socialism: A Note on Terminology," *Slavic Review* 63/2 (Summer 2004): 359.

Disciplines
Architectural History and Criticism | Contemporary Art

Comments
Reprinted from 'Architecture in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union', in A Critical History of Contemporary Architecture, 1960–2010 ed. Elie G. Haddad and David Rifkind (Farnham: Ashgate/Gower, 2014), pp. 255–274. Copyright © 2014.

Chapter 13

Architecture in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union[1]

Kimberly Elman Zarecor

Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are often associated with grey, anonymous, and poorly constructed post-war buildings. Despite this reputation, the regional architectural developments that produced these buildings are critical to understanding global paradigm shifts in architectural theory and practice in the last 50 years. The vast territory of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union covers about one-sixth of the world's landmass and currently contains all or part of 30 countries.[1] Since 1960 other national boundaries have existed in this space, including East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union. Given the region's large size, numerous languages, and tumultuous recent history—communist and authoritarian regimes, democratic revolutions, civil war and ethnic strife, political corruption, prosperity, EU accession, and economic instability—a comprehensive summary of 50 years of architectural developments cannot be achieved in one chapter. Rather than survey individual architects or projects in depth, this chapter instead explores the shared transformation in architectural discourse and practice that resulted from the region's political and economic shift to communism after World War II, and the changes that followed the fall of communism in the 1990s.[2]

Architectural Practice during Communism

After World War II and the rise of Communist parties across the region, architects living in Eastern Europe and the new territories of the Soviet Union found themselves in a novel position. Unlike the lean years of the Great Depression in the 1930s, when most architects were left without work, they now had guaranteed employment and their services were in high demand for

post-war reconstruction. Many were politically leftwing and supported the social agenda of the Communist Party, such as providing a minimum standard of housing for all citizens, whether or not they were party members. In territories that had been part of the Soviet Union before the war, architects also prospered due to the growth of the Soviet economy, a benefit of the expansion into Eastern Europe and the Baltics, and new investment in industrial infrastructure. Soon, however, the initial enthusiasm was tempered in Eastern Europe by the realization of the authoritarian nature of the regimes and the lack of professional freedom.

The professional lives of architects in communist economies differed significantly from the experiences of architects in capitalist countries. In this system, architects worked directly for the state or for state-owned enterprises; private practice was abolished.[3] These changes first occurred in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and after World War II in Eastern Europe and the new Soviet territories. Communist economics relied on planning—the prediction of future input and output needs for all sectors, typically in a five-year increment called "the five-year plan." This system relied on quantifiable targets and quotas, which forced architects to evaluate building projects in terms of material and labor costs—quantities of concrete and steel, number of units, volume of skilled and unskilled labor, and so forth. The experiential and formal aspects of architecture had no measurable value, and therefore had little relevance to design decision-making, except for one-off projects with political significance to the various regimes. As a result, architects across the region became technicians producing an industrial commodity, rather than creative artists executing an individual vision.[4]

At the same time, and perhaps as a result, the social status of the architect diminished. Architects had once been at the center of the avant-garde (one can think of the Russian Constructivists and the Yugoslav Zenitists, as well as other groups such as Dev tsil in Czechoslovakia and Blok and Praesens in Poland), but during the communist period architects typically worked anonymously at state design offices where they functioned as engineers and

managers more than designers. Those unwilling to accept new working conditions or unsuited to the professional environment took less visible positions at universities, historic preservation offices, archives, or consumer product enterprises such as furniture and industrial design companies. By the late 1960s, few practicing architects had any personal memory of architectural practice before World War II.

Because of this shared set of priorities emphasizing typification, standardization, and mass production, architectural practice across the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc shared more similarities than differences among the various countries by the 1950s. This represented a significant shift since Eastern Bloc countries like Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Hungary had sophisticated building industries before World War II, while the construction sector in the Soviet Union had been underdeveloped and largely unmechanized. New methods and processes for design, finance, and building construction were developed and shared between professionals in the various countries, often through travel exchanges and research visits. These architects also shared the everyday economic realities of communism: unyielding labor and material shortages; the push toward faster and cheaper construction methods; and the lack of long-term investment in public space and building maintenance. As János Kornai and others have noted, shortage was the system's defining characteristic.[5] Therefore, as in other sectors, architects focused on strategies to address the problems including prefabricated building elements, lightweight building materials, and the mechanization of work on building sites.

The consistency of architectural strategies across the region was remarkable both for the discipline that the economic model imposed on production and for the scale of construction (over 50 million standardized housing units were constructed in the Soviet Union alone from 1957 to 1984).[6] Manufacturing and distribution were streamlined to such a degree that one was likely to find the same building and hardware components across large swathes of the region.

Stephen Kotkin, author of two books on the Soviet steel city of Magnitogorsk, writes this about the general conditions:

> The Soviet phenomenon created a deeply unified material culture. I am thinking not just of the cheap track suits worn by seemingly every male in Uzbekistan or Bulgaria, Ukraine or Mongolia. Consider the children's playgrounds in those places, erected over the same cracked concrete panel surfaces and with the same twisted metal piping—all made at the same factories, to uniform codes. This was also true of apartment buildings (outside and inside), schools, indeed entire cities, even villages. Despite some folk ornamentation here and there (Islamic flourishes on prefab concrete panels for a few apartment complexes in Kazan or Baku) a traveler encounters identical designs and materials.[7]

R.A. French and F.E. Ian Hamilton made similar observations in their 1979 book, *The Socialist City: Spatial Structure and Urban Policy*, writing that "if one were transported into any residential area built since the Second World War in the socialist countries, it would be easier at first glance to tell when it was constructed than to determine in which country it was."[8]

This stress on sameness was also ideological, since the communist ethos of a minimum standard for all was integral to thinking about designing cities with undifferentiated class structures. Housing was the most indicative of this approach as a homogeneous housing stock of mainly two- and three-room apartments was built from East Germany to the Soviet Far East. The resulting buildings were not valued as architectural objects, but rather as indicators of production performance. Meeting quantitative targets was more important than evaluating what had been produced, thus removing any incentive to improve architecture on aesthetic or functional grounds. Mark B. Smith writes that "to some extent, this [mass-produced similitude] was the end of architecture" and "the final takeover of the profession by construction experts."[9] After decades of conforming to this system, Polish architect Maciej Krasiński had this to say in 1988, "the Polish architecture of the present is bad … The idea of "maintaining a building" both as regards its function and its technological state practically is non-existent, and if here we add,

to put it gently—the hopeless quality of the work—then the general picture provides us with no reason for optimism."[10]

This sentiment was widespread in the Communist Bloc, particularly in the 1980s, when economic and political crises led to even more acute material and labor shortages and worsening construction quality. The building technologies and construction practices developed for prefabrication and panel construction in the 1960s had not changed much by 1989. Economic planning in multi-year increments slowed down processes of change and innovation. Given the myriad architectural developments in the capitalist West in the same decades, this stagnation and failure to keep up with international standards became more apparent with each passing year.

Design Culture in Communist Europe

From the perspective of architectural form making, the buildings of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, have their origins in earlier struggles to find an appropriate architectural language for the "ideal" communist society. The Russian avant-garde provided the first images of the potential for communist architecture in the 1920s, but the style was later denounced as "bourgeois formalism," and replaced in the Soviet Union by historicist Socialist Realism after 1933. Eastern European architects, many of whom had been trained and practiced as modernists in the interwar period, faced a similar crisis when pressure mounted in the late 1940s to embrace the principles of Socialist Realism to symbolize their countries' new affiliations with the Soviet Union. The necessity to work in a Socialist Realist style was short-lived, however. After Stalin's death in 1953 and Khrushchev's 1954 call to reject Stalinist aesthetics and "useless things in architecture," Socialist Realism quickly receded.[11]

Khrushchev's "thaw" followed—the liberalization of the most repressive policies of Stalinism in politics, culture, and everyday life. With this change to official discourse, architects

were able to return to avant-garde forms from the 1920s and re-embrace the Constructivist legacy. A highlight from this period was Expo '58 in Brussels when the Soviet, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, and Yugoslav pavilions showcased an unexpected new communist style expressed in glass, concrete, and steel. The change was striking to many given how recently the region had been associated with Socialist Realism with its monumental scale and opaque materiality. This new version of modernism was not a reimagining of post-war practice as something akin to the interwar years, but rather a revival of forms and concepts that had figured prominently in avant-garde circles such as functionalism, mass production, and prefabrication, now deployed in support of the communist system by architects working for state design institutes. (Figure 13.1)

13.1   Vjenceslav Richter, Pavilion of Yugoslavia at EXPO '58, Brussels, 1958. (Photo: Archive of Yugoslavia in Belgrade)

In these years, architects once again adopted an internationalist perspective that sought out universal, rather than regional or national, principles for modern architecture including standardized building types and industrial building methods. This transformation occurred in many countries outside the Soviet Bloc, notably in Western Europe, but on a much more limited scale. Virág Molnár writes that by the early 1960s, Hungarian "architects were ready to accept their subjugation to industrialized mass production because they envisaged state socialism as an alternative route to modernity."[12] In fact, Western ideas about architecture and urban planning, particularly those derived from CIAM and Le Corbusier, were widely promoted and implemented by architects and planners working in communist countries. Exemplary manifestations of tower in the park urbanism and zoned cities can be found throughout the region. (Figure 13.2) As James Scott discusses in his book, *Seeing like a State*, this was part of the global phenomenon of post-war high-modernist city building, examples of which were found in capitalist and communist countries, and in developed and developing economies.[13]

13.2   Tower in the Park Urbanism in Bucharest, Romania. (Photo: *Arhitectura* 4 (1966): 31)

Architects in communist countries, however, had no choice about the direction of their work. The generation whose careers started around 1960 had few opportunities to challenge a consistent and systemic preference for typified, standardized, and mass-produced buildings. Prefabricated concrete—used for structural elements, facade panels, and exterior landscaping—was the primary building material available for the majority of projects, forcing architects to find creative ways to work with its limitations. Other components, such as windows, doors, and fixtures, were industrially produced in mass quantities, and in limited sizes and finishes, adding to the repetitive and uniform nature of the environment. Concrete facades were often left grey and undecorated, although better examples incorporated colored panels or carefully detailed window assemblies. For new housing developments in many countries, a portion of the budget had to be spent on public art, thus fountains, sculptures, and murals, often made of concrete and tile, were common elements in public spaces.[14] Unfortunately these attempts to beautify neighborhoods were undermined in many cases by poor workmanship during construction and a total lack of maintenance in subsequent years that hastened deterioration.

Despite these challenges, there are many examples of good design work executed in communist Europe, although the architects themselves remain largely unknown. Rather than radically departing from conventions or expectations, these projects succeeded by using a restricted palette of building elements and materials in exciting and novel ways. Noteworthy examples in the Soviet Union include the Palace of Sports in Minsk by Sergey Filimonov and Valentin Malyshev from 1966; the Lenin Museum (now the Museum of the History of Uzbekistan) by V. Muratov in Tashkent from 1970; the Cinema Hall "Rossia" in Yerevan, Armenia by Artur Tarkhanyan, Grachya Pogosyan, and Spartak Khachikyan from 1975; as well

as the venues built for the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games which included the Dynamo Sports Palace and the Druzhba Multipurpose Arena (Figures 13.3–13.4).

13.3   Sergey Filimonov and Valentin Malyshev, Palace of Sports, Minsk, Belarus, 1966. (Photo: © Hanna Zelenko / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-3.0 / GFDL)

13.4   V. Muratov, Lenin Museum (now the Museum of the History of Uzbekistan), Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1970. (Photo: © Stefan Munder / Flickr / CC-BY-SA-3.0 / GFDL)

In Eastern Europe, the reliance on prefabricated and standard elements was just as fundamental. A few representative examples are the Spodek Stadium in Katowice, Poland by Maciej Gintowt and Maciej Krasi ski from 1960; Przyczółek Grochowski housing estate in Warsaw by Oskar Hansen from 1963; the Federal Assembly of Czechoslovakia in Prague by Karel Prager from 1966; the Czechoslovak Radio Building (now the Slovak Radio Building) in Bratislava by Štefan Svetko, Štefan urkovi and Barnabáš Kissling from 1967; the National Gallery in Bratislava by Vladimir D de ek from 1969; the Palace of Culture in Dresden by Wolfgang Hänsch and Herbert Löschau from 1969; and Republic Square in Ljubljana by Edvard Ravnikar from 1977 (Figures 13.5–13.6).

13.5   Spodek Multipurpose Sports Arena, Katowice, Poland, 1960. (Photo: © Jan Mehlich / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-3.0 / GFDL)

13.6   Štefan Svetko, Štefan urkovi and Barnabáš Kissling, Czechoslovak Radio Building (now the Slovak Radio Building), Bratislava, Slovakia, 1967. (Photo: Kimberly Elman Zarecor)

In terms of square meters, the design of housing and community buildings in new neighborhoods dominated architectural practice in this period. The planned economy

fundamentally changed approaches to housing design and construction as repeated apartment buildings organized in large districts replaced virtually all other residential types in most countries.[15] Starting in the early 1970s, when the regimes finally acknowledged their collective failure to adequately raise living standards for the majority of residents, these new methods were deployed on a massive scale. In cities and towns across the region, low-cost prefabricated apartment towers sprung up creating whole new urban districts, and even new cities (Figure 13.7). In Bratislava, for example, more than 90 percent of the city's 430,000 residents lived in post-war industrialized housing by the late 1980s.[16] In the Soviet case, whole post-war cities, such as the 1960s-era car-manufacturing city of Togliatti, were built with prefabricated concrete.[17]

13.7 Housing Estate in Bratislava, Slovakia. (Photo: Kimberly Elman Zarecor)

A small intellectual class of architects rebelled against this standardization, and instead turned toward postmodernism and High-Tech in the 1970s and 1980s. They knew of these developments through architectural journals, either smuggled into the countries or available in the libraries of the state design institutes. The work of the Czechoslovak SIAL group (The Association of Engineers and Architects of Liberec) is one example. Following the Prague Spring in 1968, Karel Hubá ek and Miroslav Masák, from the state-run design office in Liberec, established an independent design studio and began to train young architects. They called their operation the SIAL Kindergarten (SIAL-Školka). The studio's work coupled the legacy of the avant-garde in central Europe with an interest in contemporary British High-Tech and engineered buildings. Hubá ek's own science-fiction-inspired Ješt d Hotel and Television Transmitter won the 1969 Perret Prize, awarded by the International Union of Architects (UIA) for its application of architectural technology (Figure 13.8). In the aftermath of the Soviet invasion in 1968 and the "normalization" period that followed, SIAL lost its independence and again became part of the state-run system in Liberec in 1971. But its architects continued

working and a group from the SIAL Kindergarten won the competition for the now iconic Máj Department Store in the center of Prague in the early 1970s.[18]

13.8   Karel Hubáček, Hotel and Television Transmitter, Ještěd Mountain near Liberec, Czech Republic. (Photo: © Ondřej Žváček / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-3.0 / GFDL)

Unlike SIAL, which operated publicly and with state consent, many architects who wanted to challenge the official discourse were forced into secrecy. Ines Weizman writes about East German and Soviet architects who gathered in private apartments to discuss magazines illicitly brought into the country and to prepare competition designs that would then be smuggled to the West or sent to international architecture competitions, such as those sponsored by the Japanese journals, *Japan Architect* and *Architecture and Urbanism (A + U).*[19] She positions these practices within the culture of dissidence, more often associated with literature and music, which was a critical development in establishing a theoretical basis for intellectuals' opposition to the regimes in the 1970s and 1980s. Depending on the local political situation in their respective countries, these "dissident" architects were subject to various levels of retribution for their lack of cooperation. Some like John Eisler from SIAL went into exile in the West, while others, like Imre Makovec in Hungary, were forced to live in rural isolation. In extreme cases, architects, including Maks Velo from Albania, and Christian Enzmann and Bernd Ettel in East Germany, were imprisoned for their perceived architectural actions against the regime (Figure 13.9).[20]

13.9   Maks Velo, Apartment Building, Tirana, Albania, 1971. (Photo: Elidor Mëhilli)

Architecture after Communism

This was the state of things in the late 1980s when the various regimes began to fall. By the early 1990s, the European communist experiment was over and countries went through a period of turbulent change, including the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the

Soviet Union, as well as vast transfers of state wealth into the hands of individuals through privatization programs. The architectural profession, centered for more than 40 years around a system of state-run design offices, had to be reinvented.

The transition was both conceptual and practical. Architects went from salaried employment in large public offices with regimented cultures to the capitalist model of private practice. Architects now had to find clients and financial backing for projects on their own, but they gained creative and conceptual freedom. The lack of intellectual rigor that characterized the state design system also had to be overcome. A high level of architectural discourse emerged into this void, particularly in Eastern Europe where many theorists and designers had continued writing in the communist period. Professional organizations and cultural institutions continued, active galleries and ambitious publishers dedicated to architecture appeared and numerous online venues for disseminating information sprung up in regional languages. All of which created a fertile intellectual context for the profession to make the difficult transition into the capitalist system.

Once the political and professional situation stabilized in the early 1990s, domestic and foreign investors were eager to tap into the region's appetite for new buildings, especially in large cities like Budapest, Moscow, Prague, and Warsaw. By the early 2000s, this demand even reached smaller cities in less developed regions, like Baku in Azerbaijan, Bucharest in Romania, and Kiev in Ukraine, making this a truly region-wide phenomenon, except perhaps east of Moscow where the financial and social situation remained difficult.

In terms of building typologies, production since the early 1990s has focused on types neglected in the communist period or which never existed at all in the region—commercial skyscrapers, office parks, luxury apartments, suburban houses, boutique hotels, high-end commercial properties, and shopping malls. Such buildings fulfill residents' yearnings to have what they missed during communism, not only the physical presence of new, colorful, and well-

made buildings, but also architecture practiced as a creative act by a known author. Financing for these projects came from multiple sources, both legal and illegal. Some were spurred by the concentrated wealth, influence, and political power that the privatization process generated, including money gained through criminal, deceptive, and corrupt means. This includes villas and vacation homes for rich oligarchs and ex-Communist officials, and office buildings, condominiums, and cultural centers financed with suspicious funds.

Investors in legitimate projects were often large international real estate companies, many headquartered in Western European, looking to take advantage of pent-up demand in the region. The real estate arm of the Dutch Bank ING was typical. In 1992, ING commissioned Frank Gehry's Dancing House in Prague and then two years later hired the Dutch architect Erick van Egeraat from Mecanoo to renovate a nineteenth-century palace in Budapest for its Hungarian offices (Figure 13.10). In 2001, ING went back to Van Egeraat for the design of a newer 41,000-square-meter (441,000-square-foot) headquarters in Budapest. In the last 10 years, ING has funded a number of large mixed-use urban developments in cities such as Warsaw, and Liberec and Olomouc in the Czech Republic. Local entrepreneurs were also rich enough as the global building boom started in the early 2000s to commission commercial and residential projects, on their own or with international partners.

13.10 Frank Gehry with Vlado Miluni , Dancing House, Prague, Czech Republic, 1996. (Photo: Kimberly Elman Zarecor)

Rather than hire the local architects trained in the communist system, many large developers hired Western "starchitects" for their speculative projects, such as Norman Foster, Frank Gehry, Jean Nouvel and Renzo Piano. Their work in the region included Nouvel's Galeries Lafayette (1996) and the Potsdamerplatz redevelopment (2000) by Renzo Piano and others in the former East Berlin, Gehry's Dancing House (1996) and Nouvel's Zlatý

And l/Golden Angel Building (2000) in Prague, and Foster's Metropolitan Building (2003) in Warsaw (Figure 13.11).

13.11 Jean Nouvel, Zlatý And l/Golden Angel Building, Prague, Czech Republic, 2000. (Photo: © Petr Novák / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-2.5 / GFDL)

Successful émigrés such as the Czechs Eva Ji ícná and Jan Kaplický, and Polish-born Daniel Libeskind, also returned to the region and built successful practices using their knowledge of the region's languages and building culture. More recently, specialist architects such as American retail designers Jerde Partnership and Austrian housing designers Baumschlager and Eberle, have also been brought in to raise the notoriety and technical level of new projects. Other developers, like the Dutch Multi Corporation, have stopped hiring outside architects altogether, and rely, instead, on an in-house team of unnamed designers to spread its global brand of commercial modernism (Figure 13.12).

13.12 Construction of Forum Nová Karolina by Multi Corporation, Ostrava, Czech Republic, 2011. (Photo: Kimberly Elman Zarecor)

A continuing interest in international architects can certainly be seen as a reaction against decades of anonymous design culture, but it is also reflects a desire to have some global status and proof of economic viability in the post-communist era. Not surprisingly, some starchitect proposals remain unbuilt because of inexperienced developers with overly ambitious designs. For example, Norman Foster had at least seven large Russian projects cancelled during the recent economic crisis, including the Crystal Island (2006) in Moscow, which would have been the world's largest building with 2.5 million square meters (27 million square feet) of floor area and the Russia Tower (2006), designed to be the world's tallest naturally ventilated building with 118 floors. There is also a scarcity of highly qualified workers in the construction industry and a

lack of government transparency and corruption in some countries. Recently this pattern—the preference for starchitects, corrupt politics, labor shortages, and a high rate of failed projects—has been repeated in Asia and the Middle East on an even larger scale.

Local architects have started to prove their potential to do work equal to their international peers. Some trained in the 1970s and 1980s have been able to adapt to the new conditions successfully, such as Vinko Penezi and Krešimir Rogina in Croatia and Josef Pleskot in the Czech Republic. There are also young practitioners, many educated both at home and in Western Europe or the United States, who are building reputations through small commissions and architectural competitions. One standout is the Slovene firm, Ofis Arhitekti, who started by designing innovative low-income housing in Slovenia and now have a global practice. Those looking to sample the region's young talent can often encounter their work at the national pavilions of the Venice Biennale where the small size of the region's countries allows for the work of many of the best designers to be exhibited. The ubiquity of English-language skills and the digitization of architectural practice mean that young Eastern European and Russian designers can now compete for projects outside their own countries, but so far few have made a name internationally.

Not surprisingly, the recent economic downturn has slowed the pace of development across the region and stopped the progress of young practitioners who are now struggling to find work. Some countries, including Latvia and Hungary, were especially hard hit by the 2008 collapse of the financial markets and subsequent crash of real estate prices. Cities and towns across the region were overconfident in the demand for new residential construction and currently have thousands of unsold units on the market. In many countries, residents have stayed in their communist-era apartments, spending money to renovate kitchens and bathrooms, instead of investing in costly new construction. The current situation is by far the worst in the former Soviet Union. Unlike countries that have joined the European Union, or the

former Yugoslavia which has finally recovered from the destructive 1990s, much of Russia and its former territories suffer from poverty and severe social problems. Little investment has reached beyond the large Russian cities on the Western side of the country or the oil-rich nations in the Caucasus Region like Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Most Russians still live in unrenovated communist-era housing that continues to deteriorate with few options for financing improvements.

Contemporary Practice

Two examples suggest the diversity and complexity of contemporary practice in the region. The Jerde Partnership's Złote Tarasy/Golden Terraces (2007), next to the Main Train Station in Warsaw's central business district, is a mixed-use development with 232,000 square meters (2.4 million square feet) of office, retail, entertainment, and hotel space and 1,400 underground parking spaces. The complex brought an American-style mall experience to Warsaw with brands like Victoria's Secret, The Body Shop, and Levi's, as well as a multiplex cinema, Burger King, the Hard Rock Cafe, and two food courts. Its signature architectural feature is an undulating glass roof, one of the largest in the world, which emerges amoeba-like from among the complex's more traditional office and hotel towers to enclose the retail space (Figure 13.13).

13.13 Jerde Partnership, Złote Tarasy/Golden Terraces, Warsaw, Poland, 2007. (Photo: © Kescior / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-3.0 / GFDL)

Like many similar mixed-use projects in the region, including Jerde's own WestEnd City Center (1999) in Budapest, it was designed to enhance the commercial infrastructure of a city that had previously relied on networks of small, poorly stocked shops and dismal office spaces. The city and ING Real Estate jointly financed the project, which was led by Chicago-based

Epstein in consultation with Jerde Partnership. Epstein opened a Warsaw office in the 1980s and helped shepherd the project through the complexities of local building codes and contractors. Like other large cities in the region, new construction is a point of pride for the city's image. Złote Tarasy is just one of many new projects by international architects in Warsaw including an office building by Norman Foster, residential towers by Helmut Jahn and Daniel Libeskind, a museum by Finnish architect Rainer Mahlemaeki, and the German Embassy by Kleine Metz Architekten. In speaking about the boom in new buildings, and reflective of a general regional attitude, Tomasz Zemla, Deputy Director of Warsaw's Department of Architecture and City Planning, recently said, "we intend to build skyscrapers, yes … to be honest, we want to show off."[21]

A different view of contemporary practice comes through in a Russian example that shows the challenges of working in the region, especially when a building has national cultural significance. The new stage for the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg finally opened in May 2013 after 11 years of planning and construction. In 2002, Los Angeles-based architect Eric Owen Moss was hired to expand the theater by adding a second stage to the existing historical complex. His proposal, which included an exuberant glass façade that appeared to explode out of a rectangular volume, drew ire from the citizens of St. Petersburg and theater professionals and worried the Ministry of Culture who had to pay the bill. The ministry decided to fire Moss and then announced an international design competition for the same site. Moss was invited to submit a new design, but did not prevail. Instead, French architect Dominique Perrault won with his vision for a new theater volume encased in a web of gold filigree. Construction started on the project and work continued for five years, but by then only the foundations were complete. At that point, the government abandoned the design due to cost and scheduling concerns.

Finally in 2009, a second competition was held and the commission awarded to Toronto-based Diamond and Schmitt Architects who had to partner with local architects, KB ViPS, who

had been working on the foundations of the Perrault proposal. The new design, which had to be adjusted slightly to incorporate some already-built foundation walls, is a contextual and comparatively conservative project with a masonry facade that matches the existing streetscape. According to the architects, its curved metal roof with a glass canopy "gives the building a contemporary identity rooted within the context of St. Petersburg's exceptional architectural heritage."[22] Unhappy with its less ambitious design, some locals have likened it to a "supermarket."[23] Even so, it is notable that the theater actually opened in 2013 after such a protracted design process.

Conclusion

The history of architecture in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in the last 50 years offers instructive lessons about the relationships between models of architectural practice and design culture. Communist economic planning imposed a set of priorities and restrictions on architects that were not formal, or even material, but rather established a professional culture through which a set of practices and standards emerged. This building culture operated for more than 70 years in the Soviet Union and 40 years in Eastern Europe. In this period, cities were created, expanded, and remade. Millions of modern apartments were built that still house the majority of the region's citizens. However these environments were left to deteriorate without proper maintenance or investment. The last 20 years have been a period of reinvigoration and stabilization of these degraded spaces. For the most part, this has been a massive rehabilitation project, rather than the widespread demolition that some predicted. Thus Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have an imprint of their communist years that will not easily be erased, even as new building types and international architectural trends become the norm.

---

[1] Countries include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, East Germany (now considered Western European as part of a unified Germany), Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

[2] Scholars use the terms communism, socialism, and state socialism to refer to the systems in these countries. For clarity, communism will be used here. Political scientist Andrew Roberts describes communist countries as "ruled by a single mass party that placed severe restrictions on all forms of civil society and free expression … [had] almost complete prohibition of private ownership of the means of production and a high degree of central planning … [and] were committed to revolution and the massive transformation of existing society." Andrew Roberts, "The State of Socialism: A Note on Terminology," *Slavic Review* 63/2 (Summer 2004): 359.

[3] The only exception was Yugoslavia where private practice was initially ended, but returned as the economy became more open to independent enterprises in the 1960s.

[4] For a discussion of the nature of this shift, see Kimberly Elman Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1960*, Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

[5] See for example, János Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[6] Henry W. Morton, "Housing in the Soviet Union," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 35/3 (1984): 72.

[7] Stephen Kotkin, "Mongol Commonwealth? Exchange and Governance across the Post-Mongol Space," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8/3 (2007): 487–531.

[8] R.A. French and F.E. Ian Hamilton, *The Socialist City: Spatial Structure and Urban Policy* (Chichester and New York: Wiley, 1979), 14–15.

[9] Mark B. Smith, *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 113.

[10] Przemyslaw Szafer, *Wspólczesna architektura polska/Contemporary Polish Architecture* (Warsaw: Arkady, 1988), 157.

[11] Thomas P. Whitney (ed.), *Khrushchev Speaks: Selected Speeches, Articles, and Press Conferences, 1949–1961* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 153–92.

[12] Virág Molnár, "Cultural Politics and Modernist Architecture: The Tulip Debate in Postwar Hungary," *American Sociological Review* 70/1 (Feb. 2005): 118.

[13] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

[14] See for example, Marie Š astná, *Socha ve m st : vztah architektury a plastiky v Ostrav ve 20.století* (Ostrava: Ostrava University, 2008).

[15] Hungary was the exception in the region, since only about 30% of the new housing construction was large state-sponsored projects. This compares to East Germany 63%, Czechoslovakia 83%, Romania 92%, and the Soviet Union 62%. See Virág Molnár, "In Search of the Ideal Socialist Home in Post-Stalinist Hungary: Prefabricated Mass Housing or Do-It-Yourself Family Home?," *Journal of Design History*, 23/1 (2010): 61–81.

[16] Henrieta H. Morav íková, *Bratislava: Atlas Sídlisk/ Atlas of Mass Housing* (Bratislava: Slovart, 2011), 33.

[17] See Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008) 80–124.

[18] Rostislav Švácha (ed.), *SIAL Liberec Association of Engineers and Architects, 1958–1990: Czech Architecture against the Stream* (Prague: Arbor Vitae, 2012).

[19] Ines Weizman, "Citizenship," in C. Greig Crysler, Stephen Cairns and Hilde Heynen (eds), *Sage Handbook of Architectural Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 2012), 107–20.

[20] Thanks to Elidor Mëhilli for information on Maks Velo who spent eight years in prison in Albania after being accused of exhibiting foreign influences and modernist tendencies in the apartment building design shown in Figure 13.9.

[21] Rudoplh Chelminski, "Warsaw on the Rise," *Smithsonian* 41/10 (February 2011): 32.

[22] "New Mariinsky Theater," Diamond & Schmitt Architects, http://www.dsai.ca/projects/new-mariinsky-theatre-russia, accessed: February 1, 2013.

[23] Anisia Boroznova, "The Mariinsky Faces New Challenges," *Russia beyond the Headlines*, December 2, 2011, http://rbth.ru/articles/2011/12/02/the_mariinsky_theater_faces_new_challenges_13888.html, accessed: February 1, 2013.