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What Was So Socialist about the Socialist City? Second World Urbanity in Europe

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Abstract

Socialist cities have most often been studied as manifestations of the socialist system itself, linked to the political fate of the Communist Parties in power during their design, construction, and expansion. This article revisits the socialist city and argues for the validity of the concept historically and in the present. Looking qualitatively at this distinct paradigm in Europe, two analytical frameworks are offered, infrastructural thinking and the socialist scaffold. The analysis shows that the universal aspiration for socialist cities was their continuous operation as synchronized instruments of economic production and social transformation in physical space. Distinct from capitalist cities, they had an ideological role in an economic model that instrumentalized cities as nodes in an integrated system, described using Stephen Kotkin's term, "single entity." The agency of the socialist scaffold has continued into the era of neoliberalism, shown here to have previously unexplored roots in socialism.

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ABSTRACT: Socialist cities have most often been studied as manifestations of the socialist system itself, linked to the political fate of the Communist Parties in power during their design, construction, and expansion. This article revisits the socialist city and argues for the validity of the concept historically and in the present. Looking qualitatively at this distinct paradigm in Europe, two analytical frameworks are offered, infrastructural thinking and the socialist scaffold. The analysis shows that the universal aspiration for socialist cities was their continuous operation as synchronized instruments of economic production and social transformation in physical space. Distinct from capitalist cities, they had an ideological role in an economic model that instrumentalized cities as nodes in an integrated system, described using Stephen Kotkin's term, 'single entity.' The agency of the socialist scaffold has continued into the era of neoliberalism, shown here to have previously unexplored roots in socialism.

In the many studies of post-socialist transformation in Europe since the early 1990s, discussions of politics and economics have often taken precedence over studying urban and spatial change. The spectacular collapse of an entire social, economic, and political system certainly drew the world's attention. The subsequent difficulties of establishing and sustaining economically viable, multiparty, democratic states were anticipated and highly monitored. Anthropologist Katherine Verdery succinctly expressed these interests in the title of her 1996 book, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?*[1] Recent events in the region, including the rise of right-wing nationalist political parties, tensions over the migrant crisis, and Russia's increasingly antagonistic global posture show that the world is still confronting this past and looking for answers to questions of legacies and futures.

As Verdery's approach indicates, not only was enthusiasm evident for studying the 'post' period of socialism, but also a deep need to dissect the system itself, much like a post-mortem on a dead body. In addition to limited access to the region before 1989, researchers working at a distance had no way to judge if sources of information were reliable, especially government data. Local researchers could not write independently of the political environment, which made international collaboration difficult. Immediately after the regimes fell, the metaphorical 'curtain' opened to reveal this largely unknown territory; not only for outsiders wanting to come in, but also for people living in the region to freely look

outward. Many new areas of scholarship opened with opportunities to do on-site research, access archives, conduct unfettered interviews, and establish research collaborations. This opening up has remade the study of socialism and its legacies.

Among the many possible research topics to explore, the socialist city itself did not have the immediacy of themes like civil society, democratic governance, privatization, and lustration. In 2007, Kiril Stanilov wrote that "in the large body of literature…on the issues surrounding the transformation of the C[entral] E[ast] E[uropean] region, studies investigating changes in urban form and structure have been quite rare."[2] He finds two reasons for this lack of research: public attention has focused on "matters related to the economic and political spheres considered central for the advancement of social reforms" and "changing the form and the structure of cities simply takes considerable amount of time."[3] He added that, "the built environment of a city is much more enduring than its social structures," a reminder that even if studies of the socialist and post-socialist city are appearing relatively later than work in other areas, it remains a critical topic for the present.[4]

Returning to Verdery's formulation of what was and what comes next, one can speculate about a third reason that studies of regional typologies of urban form and structure have been rare—until recently few case studies had been written about the socialist city in its historical formation and development over the decades of Communist Party rule. Scholars looking at the transitional period lacked knowledge of what existed, making it hard to speculate about what would be next. Without this foundation, synthetic work about the socialist city paradigm was necessarily cursory in its historical specificity and often came out of the fields of sociology and urban geography. Among this work, R.A. French and F.E. Ian Hamilton's 1979 edited collection, *The Socialist City: Spatial Structure and Urban Policy*, is the best known.[5] The post-transition volumes, *Cities after Socialism* (1996) and *The Post-Socialist City* (2007), have similar profiles in terms of research methodologies and strategies to invite specialists from within national contexts to provide chapters on their countries.[6] The lack of case studies is changing, however, and since 2010 more than a dozen books on the topic have appeared in English, in addition to substantial research in the regional languages.[7] Yet even with this surge in interest, as a sub-field of urban history, the

study of European Communist Bloc cities is still nascent and few scholars have tried to find qualitative patterns that might describe a regional phenomenon.[8]

One of the most complex questions is what to do with the concept of the socialist city once socialism itself ends. Since many of these new studies rely extensively on archives, the research embeds itself into the socialist period as a contemporary critical framework for looking at these sites, as they were being debated and built, not as historical phenomena. In this way, the cities become spatial and cultural manifestations of the socialist system itself, inextricably linked to the regimes in power during their design, construction, and expansion. And, it must be noted, ultimately judged by their failures more than anything else. This context makes it difficult to follow the idea of the socialist city beyond the end of socialism. Yet, to borrow Stanilov's formulation, even after a city's relationship to socialism is severed, and its institutions dismantled, the built environment endures. Given this longevity, studies of the socialist and post-socialist city must consider how and in what ways these cities developed, survived and then adapted as the political and social structures around them transformed.

This essay arises as a response to my research on Czech and Slovak cities, particularly around issues of housing production.[9] After more than fifteen years exploring this topic, and from a vantage point more than twenty-five years removed from the fall of the Berlin Wall, my conclusion is that the socialist city as a type is not bounded by the beginning or end of the socialist regime, but rather can be defined as a stage of urban development with a recognizable set of priorities for decision-making. Expressed in the built environment, these priorities persisted beyond the political regimes and provided much needed stability for many cities. This was particularly apparent in the transition period of the 1990s when predictions of total and immediate urban collapse in many parts of the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc proved incorrect. Because of the relatively slow pace of urban change, especially in the region's residential areas, development patterns in these cities are still imprinted with their socialist-era formation, and it appears they will be for decades longer. Thus the socialist city does not exist only in the historic imagination, but is a component of the contemporary European city, whether or not people still conceive of themselves as its residents.

Scholars have given post-socialist urbanity relatively more attention, often marking the start of the "post"-condition at the fall of the political regimes.[10] This social scientific construction of urbanity through human relations differs from a historical and cultural approach inclusive of cities' material conditions.[11] In her 2013 article, "Whatever Happened to the (Post)socialist City?," urban planner Sonia Hirt refers to the concept of "the socialist city" as "a construct which in East-Central Europe now exists only in history."[12] This essay challenges such a contention both in terms of the socialist city as a "construct" and its relegation to the past. The focus on the political end of the regimes misses a critical aspect of the transitional decades by smoothing over the complexities of a physical space produced by socialism that is being reconfigured in the new societal conditions of post-socialism.

Once the political structure of socialism fell away, these cities did not, and could not, immediately shed their socialist guise, even as society was rapidly transforming within them. The layers of embedded systems and spatial hierarchies in these cities, built and expanded during socialism, were so integral to their existences that they endured beyond the political and cultural lifespans of the regimes. In some cases, they became foundations for the regeneration of local economies and neighborhoods. In others, these layers were so rigid that they slowed down or stopped processes of economic transition and urban change to such a degree that cities have struggled to remain economically viable. This happened most often in cities that relied primarily on heavy industries that did not survive the transition.[13] In both scenarios, the socialist city still resonates in the present.

This essay offers qualitative observations of the postwar socialist city as a distinct expression of urbanity when compared with the urban development of western Europe and many other regions in the same period. It argues that the socialist city emerged from nineteenth-century industrial city models and paralleled, but did not replicate, welfare state and other capitalist urban strategies that had similar origins in the Industrial Revolution. These parallels continued through the end of the European Communist Parties and into the current period of neoliberalism, which has unexplored roots in state socialism with respect to the region's built environment. One sees in the wide array of new case studies that formal tendencies in architecture and urban form turn out not to be in and of themselves cultural markers since

architects across ideological systems embraced the postwar international style and its urbanism as appropriate to their era and circumstances. Instead, distinctions can be made around concepts of material production, professional practices, and spheres of power and ideology in the process of urbanization.

Infrastructural Thinking and the Socialist Scaffold

There is both power and trepidation in seeking patterns and models for urbanity in the European Second World.[14] This territory, including the former Soviet Union, currently contains all or part of thirty countries and covers about one-sixth of the world's landmass.[15] Although there is an impression that this space was homogeneous and under the total control of Soviet technocrats, recent scholarship has found that political boundaries and the associated differences of language and professional networks created insular experiences within national contexts. Except for a trusted elite, professional travel outside of one's country was also rare, further reinforcing these divisions. Writing in the introduction to his book, *Amnesiopolis*, about the Marzahn housing estate in East Berlin, historian of Germany Eli Rubin summarizes this challenge:

> It is tempting to make a sweeping dismissal of mass-produced housing settlements as 'undifferentiated space,' as Lefebvre once did, or equally to only see it as a 'transnational' and therefore somehow ephemeral story. But the spate of recent work on mass-produced housing in other socialist countries, including Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the USSR has largely shown that in each case the building of mass-produced housing was more of a national, rather than a transnational, narrative.[16]

As Rubin observes, the case studies so critical to advancing the foundational knowledge for comparison emphasize national context and fail to reveal transnational patterns on their own. Qualitative trends, therefore, have to emerge from locating shared approaches to the question of the socialist city and the role of ideology in its construction.

For the sake of this analysis, these trends exclude the personal experiences of human-scale inhabitation of these cities, as well as the agency of designers working on individual sites. These critical

aspects of designing, building, and living in socialist cities are receiving increasing attention in many fields including anthropology, urban studies, cultural history, and sociology. As just one example, my book, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1960*, pays close attention to the experiences and ideas of architects working in state-run design offices and writing in the architectural press.[17] As a growing body of work, this research reveals depths of complexity in socialist life rarely perceived in the dichotomous framework of the Cold War and provides radically new understandings of how individuals maneuvered within the supposedly monolithic system.[18] Yet in their particularities, the individual experiences and narratives that are so useful in the case studies, detract from the objective here to seek broad qualitative conclusions across national boundaries.

Standardized mass housing blocks were built across the world in all economic contexts, from the French banlieues and the dense residential districts of the modern Middle East, to American public housing, and the fantastically tall apartment towers of Southeast Asian cities such as Hong Kong and Singapore. Yet there was specificity to the socialist city that requires new analytical frameworks to uncover and grasp. The socialist strategy for city building encompassed both new and existing cities and had phenomenal geographic reach from the region's western boundary in East Germany to Siberia in the far east, and north from the Baltics to Bulgaria in the south. These cities manifested nineteenth-century ideas about industrial cities, but were also conspicuously transformed by socialism and state ownership of the means of production when compared to the capitalist corporate or welfare state models of city building that existed elsewhere.

Through my work on Czech and Slovak cities, I have identified two frameworks for analysis that can reveal the specificity of the socialist city—infrastructural thinking and the socialist scaffold. I first introduced these concepts in a 2013 essay, "Infrastructural Thinking: Urban Housing in Former Czechoslovakia from the Stalin Era to EU Accession."[19] In revisiting them here, the intention is to more fully explore their potential for the Second World, particularly in Europe. Importantly, these concepts are not offered to create oppositional definitions between First and Second World, East and West, or capitalism and communism. Instead, these approaches are recognized as existing to varying degrees in all

parts of the world and economic systems, but with a marked intensity and all-encompassing logic when situated within the ideology of state socialism under the leadership of the region's Communist Parties.[20]

In identifying these approaches across multiple national contexts within the region and as a comparative framework to look beyond the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, it becomes possible to differentiate the qualities of the socialist city as a subset of priorities found among all modern, industrialized, technologically driven forms of urbanity. In her 2010 article, "Cities in a World of Cities: The Comparative Gesture, " Jennifer Robinson speculates about the difficulties of comparative urban research and argues for experimental and integrative models that move beyond an "individualizing" approach that compares unique case studies while minimizing their commonalities.[21] She offers an alternative model that focuses on finding shared "units of comparison" to avoid the misguided "assumption that variation either in outcome or process across different categories of cities…renders these cities incommensurable."[22] This observation is crucial with respect to the lack of qualitative comparative work on socialist cities since the collection of new case studies has so far been viewed as evidence of difference among the various national contexts, or to use her term, individualized. The case study materials have not yet been used to develop units of comparison, which is where this essay aspires to make a critical leap. Robinson writes:

> There are many aspects of cities that are reproduced serially across the world of cities or influenced by the same processes and actors—governance regimes are one aspect, but also phenomena such as architecture and design, detailed technologies of management, policies and political programmes. Such phenomena could be considered comparable in their own right across very different urban contexts and thus be the units of comparison.[23]

It is this strategy that may be most productive—to think in the terms of the shared aspects of governance, architecture and design, planning practices, and politics across the spectrum of socialist cities. In doing so, socialist cities become both more similar to, and also ideologically distinct, from other modern urban typologies in Europe and globally. In the simplest terms, all socialist cities were modernist cities, but not all modernist cities were socialist. This essay endeavors to explore this statement as an ideological

proposition with material and spatial consequences.

Infrastructural thinking is decision making propelled by the requirements and scale of urban infrastructure. On its own, this is not a socialist concept. Twentieth-century urbanism relied for the creation of some of its primary archetypes on infrastructural thinkers such as Le Corbusier, Robert Moses and Kenzo Tange. Yet none of them achieved the scale of urban transformation that one saw in state socialist countries, neither in their own time, nor in the fulfillment of long-term plans that projected their ideas into the future. One reason was that their contexts did not allow them the same level of legal and spatial control as the Communist regimes. Another was that their ideal urbanisms were not conceived within a state project of the total societal transformation that instrumentalized the city as a critical element in these efforts.

As an approach, infrastructural thinking required a mechanism of implementation. In the context of state socialism, this is what I call the socialist scaffold. It can be described as a basic infrastructure for future growth onto which other systems—economic, social, political, environmental—can attach and become activated. The socialist scaffold became material and perceptible through urban systems, but it also had an overarching ideological thrust that allowed a set of decisions to cohere into a recognizable strategy. Because of this, the scaffold remained with shifts in political regimes (Stanilov's idea of endurance is once again useful here). Its purposefulness did not derive from an aesthetic expression of power that could lose or change meaning over time, but rather from relationships manifest between objects, images and people in space. The example of Socialist Realism in the satellite countries in the early 1950s showed how a narrow, primarily aesthetic approach had little impact in the long term.[24]

The socialist scaffold was an integrated system of parts and the logic of how they fit together. Its components operated in relation to each other. These included: public transportation networks; road and rail systems that served major sites of production and distribution; centralized public utilities that extended into new districts as they were built; dispersed green spaces and recreational areas; state-sponsored cultural institutions like museums, theaters, ballet and opera companies; and a series of housing developments, each with their own set of services and schools. The power of the scaffold was its

capacity to anticipate and accommodate new nodes as they were needed in the network—a proactive, rather than a reactive approach that tried to think beyond the present. It also operated outside of the realm of real estate development and its profit-making motives, which had profoundly affected urban development in all capitalist contexts, especially in the United States and Western Europe after World War II.[25]

Transportation networks, for example, had to move people between their residences and places of work. In many socialist contexts, this meant periphery-to-periphery movement, not the traditional pattern of moving people from the edges to the city center. This required transportation planning that was synchronized with the master planning process and could be responsive to the particular needs of large industries. As neighborhood-scale residential districts were built, this logic also played out at a pedestrian scale as the designs called for residents to walk for just a few minutes from their apartments to stores, restaurants, cultural spaces, schools, and bus or tram stops, dispersed in a controlled pattern across a defined territory. This idealistic vision of a synchronized life depended on the flawed assumption that the infrastructure would be ready at same time that residents arrived, scaled to accommodate the number of people in a given district, and that each location would have the same goods, services, and frequency of transportation options. Some of the harshest criticism of life in socialist-era neighborhoods came from the failures of this infrastructure to perform as promised.

The specificity of the socialist city and its scaffold is then best understood through the particular connections that it promoted to organize layers of urban life and how it became a dynamic catalyst for growth over time. In their concluding essay in *The Housing Question*, editors Edward Murphy and Najib Hourani write in reference to my formulation of these concepts that the scaffold "contours how, where, and when future development and redevelopment might take place. Moreover, it remains relatively fixed despite transformations in other layers, objects, and institutions of the urban network that may, themselves, undergo ideological, political, or cultural transformation."[26] They write that "this notion of infrastructures as connectors that organize and combine across multiple layers of the urban speaks to a conception of such infrastructures as possessing their own particular form of agency in the development

and redevelopment of the city and in the transformation of relations of which it is made."[27] Their critical contribution to advancing this concept was to see the autonomous nature of this agency, and thus provide one explanation as to how the socialist scaffold has continued to endure beyond the end of the communist regimes as an active, rather than a reactive presence.

Independently of my use of the term scaffold in the context of state socialism, literature on ecological urbanism refers to a similar idea of a scaffold. In the introduction to their edited collection, *Ecology and Design: Frameworks for Learning*, Bart Johnson and Kristina Hill reference the "generative metaphor" of the "scaffold as a structure that allows new forms to be constructed but does not determine those forms completely."[28] As sources, they refer to landscape architect and planner Ann Whiston Spirn's idea of "an open-ended 'framework congruent with the deep structure of a place' that could continue to evolve" and designer James Corner's notion of "creating 'catalytic frameworks' rather than finished works."[29]

In her own work on cities, Spirn contrasts "ephemeral" changes to the "surface of the landscape" with a city's "deep structure" as defined by criteria like the ecological fundamentals of "climate," "geology," "physiography," and "bio-climatic zone."[30] In socialist cities, the value of the scaffold as an analytical tool is less about ecological systems (although they can play a part through extraction of natural resources like iron ore or coal), and exactly about the organization of the urban surface. In organizing its territory according to the ideological principles of the socialist economy and infrastructural thinking, the city was activated as a unified space of social transformation and material production. The components of this integrated working system can then be understood in two categories—those that were independent of the existence of socialism, Spirn's "deep structure," and those "ephemeral changes" that disappeared with it. This disappearance left open the possibility of new appropriations of this embedded deep structure in a different political configuration. As discussed in the essay's final section, one way to understand this is to observe how local elites, many of whom have taken a neoliberal position relative to urban development, continue to tap into the deep structure to retain and enhance their status in the power hierarchy.

The City as a 'Single Entity'

As Robinson's concept of units of comparison suggests, infrastructural thinking and the socialist scaffold reveal possible new points of comparison among cities that case studies have portrayed as unique and developing on individual paths. The universal aspiration for a socialist city was that it operated continuously as a synchronized instrument of economic production and social transformation in physical space. As a function of the master planning process itself, socialist urbanity simultaneously expressed the formal logic of the master plan with its two-dimensional map-based imagery and also a time-based projection of how that master plan would transform over time as a totality. The passage of time is already implicit in the concept of infrastructure, defined by *Merriam-Webster* as "the resources required for an activity" or "the underlying foundation or basic framework [of] a system or organization."[31] Accordingly, infrastructure is passive until acted upon through activity or utilized by a system or organization. Therefore, such a time-based approach is necessary and useful in thinking about the design, implementation and experience of socialist cities. Since all socialist cities were designed to have logical and stable scaffolds, plans anticipated managing growth over time and a continual reinvigoration of the city as new territories and resources—labor, capital, and physical infrastructure—were brought into its domain. Thus the city was expanding, but in a controlled and rational way determined by strict planning practices across various infrastructure scales and the creation of urban master plans.

Ideology was critical in distinguishing this function of the socialist master plan from large-scale master planning in other political environments. Unlike in a democratic context, designs for socialist cities assumed that the regime's institutions and functionaries could determine and regulate all variables including legal control over land use.[32] Designers at state-run design institutes were tasked with setting in motion an urban system that would come into being over decades, rather than in the few years of a typical capitalist real-estate development cycle. Such step-by-step growth was desirable given that the five-year planning increment required development to be envisioned as a linear, mechanized process that proceeded according to a predetermined plan, which came from the logic inherent to the scaffold. Projections for large new housing estates, for example, with their equitably distributed shops, schools and public

services, as well as extensions of public transportation routes to reach them, appeared in plans years before there were material, financial or labor resources to support their construction. This was necessary to propel the logic of the scaffold into the future. State socialism was always a future-looking and aspirational ideology. Planning, and the system itself, would lose its legitimacy if, at each new step, the network did not continue to replicate itself.

Stephen Kotkin ruminated on these qualities of the socialist city—its totalizing vision that promised a better future, its imperative to expand, its role as an instrument of an integrated economy and its ideological function—in his classic 1995 book, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*.[33] Writing about Magnitogorsk, a new city built starting in the 1930s in the Ural Mountains to mine ore and produce steel, he described the socialist city as a creation of a system that believed in "the reliability of scientific planning and the seemingly limitless possibilities afforded by modern technology, when combined with the ultimate science of society, Marxism."[34] He argued that for the regime "socialism represented nothing less than the full transcendence of capitalism" and that it would be "the magic of planning" that would bring about this new society.[35] On the economy, Kotkin observed that in Soviet Russia, "virtually the entire national economy became state-owned and state-run, technically a single entity. Soviet propagandists, with an eye on the largest European and American companies, boasted of 'our' firm, the 'USSR.'"[36]

In thinking about this at the scale of the Second World, the concept of a "firm," with its self-conscious gesture to European or American corporate structures, is useful in revealing how the economies of the Eastern Bloc countries each transformed into their own "single entity" that regulated its internal economy and also managed international trade. The state became the functional equivalent of a large, international corporation. This was one reason for the formation of COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) to regulate intra-Bloc trade and develop collaborative efforts between the countries, including distributing the responsibility of producing specialized equipment across the region to avoid redundancies in the network.[37] By extending this concept to the design of socialist cities, each one can be seen as a node in its country's single entity, reinforcing the master narrative of the national

economy by positioning itself as a generator of specific material goods and general prosperity, while also reproducing the idea of the single entity at multiple scales—the urban region, the city, the district and the neighborhood.

Cities specialized in different industries and the national economy relied upon the network as a whole to meet its goals, something like COMECON within a national context, but also like a large corporation with many divisions. They expanded outward geographically and through increased industrial production multiplied their economic effects, thereby intensifying their local contribution to the network. Any one of these cities then also had the possibility to become a site of expansion or an example of contraction in cases of failures. At the same time, these spaces facilitated the aspirational social project of 'building socialism.' The goal of which, historian Mark B. Smith argued, "was no longer simply to benefit as many people as possible but to transform their consciousness in the context of proto-communism."[38] In another imagining of this point, architectural historian Catherine Cooke described socialist cities as providing images of the "radiant future" to entice people to sacrifice for the greater good in the present.[39]

The term microrayon or microdistrict, used in the Soviet Union and some of the satellite countries from the late 1950s onward, describes a new neighborhood-scale urban territory that existed in this network and encapsulated the multiscalar correspondence of parts of the single entity. Architectural historian Juliana Maxim defined the microrayon (*microraion* in Romanian) as "a residential ensemble conceived so as to constitute an organic unity, aimed at connecting its inhabitants through the everyday use of shared social and cultural institutions (among which schools and daycare centers figure prominently) and of parks and green spaces."[40] Maxim described its overall architectural "effect" this way:

> Although mostly composed of mute, abstract buildings, the *microraion* is shaped by a
> search for formal effect. Unlike the grid, it does not proceed through the systematic
> repetition of a single building type, and instead reads as a collection of forms; if a
> building type is repeated, it is as a short, rhythmic series, each element of the series
> differentiated either by staggering, or by varying its orientation. The grid was formed by

the addition of identical elements and therefore could be endlessly extended; by contrast,

the *microraion* is a fully constituted, unbreakable, organic, and finite entity inside of

which each housing block stands as an irreplaceable component.[41]

With a population of no more than 20,000 people, this ensemble of buildings was designed to provide for

all of its residents' daily needs with the exception of a place of work.[42] A largely pedestrian space, "the

maximum distance between any dwelling, service, and public transportation should not [have] be[en]

more than 500 meters."[43] Pedestrians and car traffic were separated and major roads went around, not

through the district. The microrayon was conceived as "the smallest administrative unit in the socialist

reorganization of the urban territory…and was repeatedly touted as a socialist spatial answer to the

ideological and practical imperatives of a new society."[44]

This division of people into repeated districts of a pre-determined size recalled earlier population

distribution schemes like Howard's Garden City, Ildefonso Cerda's rationalization of urban growth in

Barcelona, or the linear city model of Soria y Mata, later adapted by Milyutin, but here there was a

different understanding of scale. The microrayon was to be an "organic unity" on its own, as well as one

unit in an ever-expanding scheme to proliferate socialism. Maxim argued that the microrayon was not just

a neighborhood unit or a superblock as might appear in a capitalist city or in the writings of the CIAM

architects like Le Corbusier, but rather something more profound, since "the word micro implies planning

of a radically different scale, one that engulfs the entirety of the national territory, and of which the

microraion is but one small constitutive part."[45] For her, "the most important point about the microraion is

that it fits within a tightly orchestrated hierarchy of increasingly larger spatial units."[46] This reinforces the

importance of infrastructural thinking as a multiscalar strategy used by the regimes to organize such units.

The design of the microrayon, with its choreographed series of residential blocks and community

buildings of varied sizes in a composition without grids, exemplifies the underlying logic of the socialist

scaffold that sets up the spatial relationships within the ensemble.

Other state socialist countries, like Czechoslovakia, used different names for these types of spaces

such as *sídliště* in Czech, *sídlisko* in Slovak, or the German *Siedlung*.[47] These terms, all rendered typically

in English as housing estate or housing development, carry with them the added meaning of a site with a name, a unified architectural and urban expression, and recognizable boundaries, but not a prescribed number of residents as in a microrayon. In the postwar period, the housing estates shared characteristics with the microrayon such as: repetitive housing types dispersed among an ensemble of different types of buildings; the separation of pedestrian and car traffic; plans for schools, parks, and other services within a walkable radius of every residence; and reliance on public transportation. One difference was that the size of a *sídliště, sídlisko*, or *Siedlung* depended more directly on its relationship to the existing urban fabric, which was denser and more historically complex in Central Europe. Another aspect of dissimilarity was that most of the Central European countries did not attempt to incrementally and systematically distribute urban populations across their territories, as way the case in the Soviet Union or Romania.[48] For this reason, the housing estates in places like Czechoslovakia or East Germany lacked the module character of a self-contained, population-limited 10,000- or 20,000-person district that could be deployed anywhere and repeated once the population threshold was reached.

Failures of Socialist Implementation

This is not to say that plans ever came together as effortlessly or completely as the planners expected. All socialist cities were rife with material and labor shortages, delays, cancelled projects, and political infighting. The even and uninterrupted pace projected in planning narratives did not reflect the dysfunctional reality of the region. Construction was slow, quality materials difficult to obtain, and budget shortfalls often meant that no services were available when housing estates opened to residents. Because of this, people often had to wait months or years for roads and sidewalks to be paved, promised shops to open, and transportation lines to operate at intervals that met the high demand from commuters. Many large-scale plans, like the Prague metro system first proposed in the late 1950s, took so many decades to implement that the post-1989 government inherited it as an incomplete project. This is evidence itself of infrastructural thinking, since its hoped-for existence, however far in the future, remained integrated with the planning process. The result was that when the metro finally did add more

stops (expansion started in 1998 and ended in 2015), the new stations immediately served large residential

neighborhoods built decades earlier in anticipation of the metro service that only just arrived.

A failure to succeed is not unusual for ambitious planning projects. Independent of the national

or political context, plans often fail to come to fruition. Systems more nimble than multi-year state

socialist planning regimes adapt and change course when this happens—unsuccessful plans become

opportunities for new responses. The specificity of communism was that the entire logic of the system

relied on the faithful completion of plans in the future. The totalizing force of the plan and its long

duration in each five-year planning cycle meant that alternative solutions rarely came about.

Modifications could be made at the start of a new plan, but not while it was in use. So when a proposal

for a new building project failed to be implemented, the intended site often remained empty and the

project on hold indefinitely. This can be ascribed to the absence of financial motives for development and

the lack of opportunities to propose new ideas. The state apparatus gave itself few opportunities to

respond creatively or quickly to such situations.

A famous example of this type of response was the Palace of the Soviets in Moscow. The project

was the focus of high-profile design competitions in the early 1930s and Stalin wanted the project to be a

centerpiece of the city's new urban plan.[49] After a Socialist Realist tower design by Boris Iofan was

chosen as the winning proposal, construction started on the foundations, but was halted during World War

II and never resumed. The site, cleared in 1931 in anticipation of the new building, remained empty

through the war and for nearly fifteen more years until a large open-air swimming pool was constructed

over the abandoned foundations in the late 1950s. This temporary use for such a prominent site near the

Kremlin only reinforced the absence of a more significant structure. In the end, no building appeared on

the site and the pool remained until 1995 when work started on a replica of the building destroyed to

make way for the project, the iconic nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox church, Cathedral of Christ the

Savior.

In Czechoslovakia, a more typical example in the Eastern European context might be the

incomplete construction of the Poruba neighborhood in the industrial city of Ostrava. Designed in the

early 1950s as a showpiece of Czechoslovak Socialist Realist planning, Poruba eventually housed more than one-third of the city's 330,000 people; many of whom worked at nearby steel mills and coal mines.[50] Poruba's districts were built over decades in architectural styles that changed from the 1950s into the 1980s. The main boulevard through Poruba, Lenin Street (now Main Street) was a primary corridor for the neighborhood from its inception. At its two ends, the plan originally called for two skyscrapers—one an administrative building for the technical university with a new campus in Poruba, and the other, much taller, would have been a 150-meter-high headquarters for the local national committee (the local governing unit of the Communist state).[51] Neither skyscraper was built, nor were alternative plans for the sites ever implemented, so this monumental boulevard had empty lots at either end. In 2006, a university administration building finally opened at the northern termination point of Main Street, although its horizontal profile and asymmetrical volume was counter to the original intention to have a vertical focal point on axis with the boulevard. At the other end of the street, to this day, the lot remains undeveloped. In place of the large tower, there is a grass lawn crossed by pedestrian paths, which serves only as a visual and spatial foreground to the 1960s prefabricated apartment blocks of the residential district beyond.

Yet the argument here is that these failures do not diminish the value of infrastructural thinking or the socialist scaffold as methods for historical analysis, or lessen their potential to expose underlying similarities among socialist cities. Success in implementation is only one unit of comparison, to return to Robinson's formulation. If considered in terms of approaches to infrastructure and the ideology of economic planning, new and expanded socialist cities look much more similar to each other than the case studies predict. By definition, the case studies and the experiences of individual people living in the cities are individual narratives of implementation, not explorations of the socialist city and its scaffold as an urban typology.

As the preponderance of evidence shows, state socialism was messy, corrupt, and uncontrolled. Rudolf Bahro, an East German dissident coined the phrase "actually existing socialism" in his 1978 book, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, to capture this distance from the ideal to the reality.[52] In seeking a path for comparative analysis, this gap has intentionally been given little relevance in this framing of the

research questions. There are two reasons to make such a choice. First, as Kotkin argued, socialist planners, politicians, and designers, in the Soviet Union and the postwar Eastern Bloc, imagined the socialist city as a rational entity based on the science of planning and proceeded in their work accordingly. He observed that their sincere, albeit utopian and at times misguided, aspirations should not be dismissed out of hand as fundamentally wrong, and deserved closer examination. I share the same perspective based on my research on the work of Czech and Slovak architects and planners. One can learn about these cities from their intended plans and how they integrated into a shared vision across the Second World as much as from the imperfect or incomplete results of this vision in any one place.

Secondly, the reasons that implementation failed changed from place to place depending on local problems such as interference by politicians, economic shortages, and lack of construction knowledge and skilled labor, as well as through the agency of inhabitants who responded in both positive and negative ways to plans determined for them by others. The argument here is that the only way to think through a qualitative reading of the cities as a recognizable group is to step back from these localized contexts and look instead at fundamental units of comparison. In this way, the idea of the scaffold is also part of the conceptual framing of the argument in that there is a separation between a shared set of intentions on one hand and the contingencies of the case studies, which are more about "actually existing socialism," on the other. The political elite of the regimes determined these shared intentions as part of their political propaganda campaigns, but one should not see this as just a top-down phenomenon. Architects and urban planners embraced the socialist city and its new type of urbanity because it promised to improve the standard of living for many people and also allowed them to design and construct significant buildings and neighborhoods. As I argue in my book, their efforts to work within the system to achieve a long-standing vision of social improvement through design showed that individual agency still mattered.[53] Yet as part of the total enterprise of socialism and its tendency toward infrastructural thinking, these projects were embedded in the workings of the single entity as small-scale expressions that were both part of and microcosms of the whole.

Expanding Cities

  Infrastructural thinking thrived in state socialist economies specifically because the people in charge—up and down the institutional hierarchies—were technocrats who embraced the fundamental idea and incremental pace of multi-year planning. The classic Soviet 'five-year plan' became the model unit for the Eastern Bloc satellites, although others were also used at times. The basis of their work was a belief in the power of quantitative measuring and scientific methodologies to solve long-term social and economic problems. Critical of capitalism, the technocrats argued that its unpredictability had created societies with imbalances in supply and demand, unequal distributions of wealth and political power, and ugly, chaotic cities. They echoed Frederick Engels from his 1872 text, *The Housing Question*, where he argued that only reducing the square meters of a bourgeois apartment would not solve the housing crisis on a massive scale, instead the complete reorganization of everyday life toward communal living was needed.[54] The new socialist cities and the life that would flourish within them would be efficient, clean, and joyful. As sites of production in the hierarchy of the single entity, each city would serve the country's, and therefore the people's, greater goals.

  Because of promises made to improve living standards and to revive the regional economies after World War II, every new communist state expanded its cities and towns. The Soviet Union also started a more intense campaign of housing construction in the 1940s that accelerated rapidly during Khrushchev's time.[55] Some of the satellites built new cities imbued with great meaning as symbols of the 'building of socialism,' such as Nowa Huta in Poland, Stalinstadt (now Eisenhüttenstadt) in East Germany, and Sztálinváros (now Dunaújváros) in Hungary—each one a Stalinist steel mill city newly designed in the early 1950s.[56] The Soviet Union also built many new cities around industries like electronics, car manufacturing, atomic energy, and even scientific research.[57] Yet contrary to perceptions outside of the region, socialist cities in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were rarely built from scratch; extension and expansion were much more common strategies. This typically occurred in conjunction with plans to increase production in the dominant heavy industry sectors and to provide for the corresponding growth in the size of the industrial labor force. These workers and their families needed housing and services in

proximity to their jobs. In this sense, housing was a material infrastructure of the state in socialist countries.

Consistent with the idea of the single entity, new factories were not built without proposals for additional housing and neighborhood services (although often the housing, and especially the services, took longer to complete than planned). For this reason, the core building type of these new and expanding socialist cities was housing, primarily in multiunit buildings designed as standardized, typified, and, in most countries, prefabricated objects that could be built to preset specifications repeatedly on multiple sites. This was also reflected in concept of the microrayon, which did not contain industrial sites, but focused instead on the residential experience and developing a socialist consciousness among the residents through interactions in shared community spaces. As a component of the socialist scaffold, the provision of housing was a dominant organizing element, much more so than in other systems, since there were fewer commercial and service buildings in socialist cities relative to the number and density of housing units.

As detailed in my research and that of other scholars, the Czechoslovak city of Ostrava illustrated this model of expansion.[58] A major center of coal mining and steel production, it was a well-established industrial city by the mid-twentieth century.[59] After 1945, with major investment in its physical infrastructure and heavy industries, its population grew by 50% from 215,000 in 1950 to 331,000 in 1990.[60] By the 1970s, the city reached its current physical size, sprawling across 214 square kilometers (83 square miles) and encompassing territory that had been 34 separate communities before 1924. Two major new residential districts of industrialized and largely prefabricated housing were built after 1951, Poruba and Ostrava-Jih (South City); more than 200,000 people lived in these two districts by 1980.[61] Even with its long history as an industrial city, Ostrava was conceptualized as a socialist city because of its transformation in this period. Its existing collection of dispersed workers' settlements, industrial sites, and its small historic urban core became an integrated entity, whose cohesion was reinforced starting in the early 1950s by a strong socialist scaffold that determined how it would continue to expand. In the postwar period, the city created an extensive intracity transportation network for people and goods,

operated city-scale public utilities, and built a series of new housing developments that were coordinated with locations of industrial sites as part of an urban master plan. For these reasons, Ostrava has been described as an urban agglomeration organized around nodes, a very different kind of urbanism from a classic European radial city or a socialist realist grand ensemble.[62]

My hypothesis is that the strength of Ostrava's socialist scaffold, which resulted from strong infrastructural priorities for industry, saved the city from collapse after 1989, even as major industries shut down and unemployment rose above 20% for a time in the 1990s.[63] One local social scientist has made a similar point, characterizing Ostrava as an "industrial city in a post-industrial society."[64] In my analysis, Ostrava as a city is still physically oriented around its socialist-era scaffold, but now the nodes of its economic network have changed. Like all socialist cities after the end of political socialism, it no longer has a strong position in the single entity as a critical site of production. To regenerate itself, the city repurposed its industrial nodes— the steel mills, coal mines, and state-run businesses that were the foundation of the socialist economy—and replaced them with shopping malls, tourist sites, office towers, light industry and research parks. The backbone of it all, the most resilient component of the scaffold, is its stable housing stock. People stay in the city, because they inherited property or can afford to purchase housing at affordable rates. Government programs have provided significant funds for the rehabilitation of building façades and public spaces, so the quality of the built environment in socialist-era neighborhoods has markedly improved.[65]

Although the population is slowly decreasing and urgent questions are being asked about the viability of its new service-oriented economy, Ostrava has endured and taken advantage of its strong scaffold to avoid the worst of the predictions about its collapse. As a test case for the application of infrastructural thinking and the socialist scaffold as analytical frameworks, this discussion of Ostrava shows how a qualitative analysis can distinguish unique conditions in a particular city while also describing the typical and shared qualities of socialist cities across a vast territory. In other words, these tools unearth similarities, as well as differences, within a coherent framework. The clarity of seeing these similarities emerge from the individualized case studies brings us closer to understanding the socialist

city, in its various expressions, as a recognizable urban type with relevance to the global comparative conversation about modern cities.

What Was So Socialist about the Socialist City?

Similar mass housing architectures of groups of apartment blocks appeared in American inner cities, on the fringes of Western European cities, and in the modernizing post-colonial spaces of Africa, Asia, and South America around the same time that the Eastern Bloc and Soviet Union had housing construction booms. From 1965 to 1974, Sweden built one million homes to overcome a long-standing housing shortage that came about when much of its population left rural areas after World War II and moved en masse to cities. The state-sponsored "Million Homes Programme" was a centerpiece of the Swedish welfare state and did not limit its audience to lower-income groups, but rather "the blocks of flats built by municipally owned housing companies or private builders were intended for all home-seekers regardless of their income… [and were] to be of the same quality as the housing in general."[66] In their writing on the Swedish example, the authors Thomas Hall and Sonia Vidén discussed the controversial reception of some aspects of the program, which concentrated new units in apartment buildings and small single-family houses in "large, rapidly developed areas in peripherals locations."[67] The criticisms of "shortcomings" included "visual monotony, a desolate external environment, lack of local service and transport, alienation and isolation."[68] These criticisms, so similar to the discussions around socialist housing, did not ebb until the 1990s.

This leads to the inevitable question of whether or not it is possible to identify the particularly socialist qualities of the socialist city. Was this just the spread of postwar international high modernism into a different system of politics and production? One response points to architectural quality, arguing that the socialist city was similar in design to other examples of postwar modernism, but executed with lower degrees of technical proficiency, construction quality, and design ambition. Even when the designs were thoughtful in considering how to live in small spaces, standardized prefabricated construction was often executed poorly with thin walls, drafty rooms, and inadequate sound isolation. Public spaces

suffered from budget shortfalls and many planned green spaces were just muddy expanses for many years. Yet knowing that these same concerns were also voiced in Sweden, where the quality was objectively better, indicates that critiques focused on quality were about more than just aesthetics. The concern was also about the type of city being built and changing lifestyles in the new environment. A focus on quality alone also does not work for the developing world where the quality, and quantity, of communist housing was respected, especially in terms of public space and the integration of physical infrastructure within the designs. As Lukasz Stanek has shown in his research on the architectural connections between communist Europe and post-colonial Africa and the Middle East, second-world architects were in high demand globally in this period for their technical skills and experience working on large-scale projects.[69]

Unsurprisingly, the regimes attacked American housing culture to show the superiority of their efforts. The Russians specifically criticized American mass housing (often public housing) as designed for the lowest classes, promoting segregation, and being purely functional without the emphasis on building community life.[70] They dismissed any discussion about aesthetic similarities as irrelevant given the structural problems within capitalist societies. Because of its weak tradition of mass housing, legal racial segregation, and the unabashed emphasis on individual over community interests, the United States certainly was an easy target for communist rhetoric starting in the 1950s. Aware of these vulnerabilities, Khrushchev invested heavily in apartment construction and production of consumer goods to bolster the Soviet claims that its system was the better of the two.

As Greg Castillo wrote his 2009 book, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design*, this battle over lifestyle between the Soviet Union and the United States was not just a frivolous competition over consumer culture.[71] The famous "kitchen debate" between Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and American Vice-President Richard Nixon at the model kitchen display at the 1959 U.S. Exhibition in Moscow showed how critical domestic space had become to the ideological project of the region's Communist Parties. Writing about the Cold War kitchen as "a technopolitical node that linked the state, the market, and the family," Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann argued that the Moscow

interaction "cut to the heart of the kinds of technical artifacts and systems that their respective societies would produce…[and] offered a diplomatic meeting point with science and technology as lingua franca."[72] They suggested that the American emphasis on "individual consumer goods" did not make sense to the Soviets who "were dedicated to technological systems that would be accessible to and affordable to all citizens."[73]

The harder comparison to reconcile was always to Western Europe and the welfare state model in countries such as Sweden, the UK, West Germany, France, and Italy, where governments had a more collective understanding of the public good and embraced mass housing in ways that never existed in the United States.[74] While Soviet and Eastern Bloc architects could easily point to the failure of Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis or the misery shown in press coverage of public housing projects in cities like Chicago and New York, Western Europe posed a more significant ideological threat since it appeared for several decades that their mass housing schemes were fulfilling their intended role to provide widespread access to good, modern, and efficient housing. But even in Europe, mass production of apartment units represented a minimum standard and a solution for the most needy. The single-family house remained the ideal and one attainable for a substantial segment of the population over time. Sweden's Million Homes Programme is a good example of the persistence of this aspiration, since one-third of the built units were in single-family houses, even though this meant housing fewer people.[75]

The most critical distinction between socialist and capitalist cities was the integrated role that the city played in the state project of socialism. The city was not just an architectural or spatial proposition that had precedents in interwar modernism or nineteenth-century industrial cities. In its purest conception, the intention and ambition of the socialist city was total transformation. Mark B. Smith wrote about the point at which the socialist city moved beyond its capitalist origins in his 2010 book, *Property of Communists*, where he argued that the Khrushchev era was the first period in which Soviet cities differentiated themselves from mass housing typologies elsewhere.[76] He claimed that by the end of the 1950s, with the microrayon, Soviet planners finally left behind "conventional" methods and developed a distinctly socialist urban approach.[77] He writes:

The Soviet program was unique not because of the enormity of the construction project or

because of the ideology and practices of the microdistrict but because of its effect on

everyone's lives, not just the poorest. This separates it fundamentally from the welfare

states of Western Europe and the United States. Unlike the increasingly troubled council

estates of Britain or the housing projects of the United States, all kinds of people lived in

Soviet microdistricts, bringing traditional family and neighborhood rhythms to

complement and clash with those of proto-communist organization…One way or another,

and increasingly as the Khrushchev era gave way to the next two decades, very large

sections of the population, including parts of the top elite, spent a part of their lives in

these places.[78]

Stephen Kotkin uses the term "civilization" to describe the all-encompassing worldview and shared

everyday practices that emerged in Magnitogorsk, and by virtue of the idea of the single entity to all other

Soviet socialist cities starting in the 1930s.[79] In her book on Nowa Huta, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta,

Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949–56*, historian Katherine Lebow did not go as far as to say that Nowa

Huta created a new civilization, but she argues that the roots of the Solidarity opposition movement in the

1980s can be traced back to the 1950s experiences of the city's residents who built the city as brigade

workers in construction and heavy industry.[80]

These case studies reinforce that it was more than just the formal expression and urban design of

the cities that made them socialist, but also the social relations and sense of community that they

consciously produced. The transformative aspect of the socialist city was in this integration, which

becomes visible through the concepts of infrastructural thinking and the socialist scaffold. It was not the

architectural style per se, or the organization of civic spaces and community life, or the autonomous space

of the microrayon, but the integrated functioning of the city as a node in the single entity organized

according to the logic of the scaffold and infrastructure planning that defined the specific experience of

living in socialist cities.

Socialist Origins of Post-Socialist Neoliberalism

 As a postscript to this analysis, this final section speculates on how the socialist scaffold remains a critical concept today and offers a new perspective on how contemporary post-socialist cities transitioned to neoliberal approaches so easily and completely after the end of the Communist political regimes. Patterns of urban development in socialist cities before 1989 appear to have had the seemingly paradoxical effect after 1989 of preparing cities and their leaders to become model neoliberal capitalist actors. At first, this appears to be a contradictory argument, but thinking beyond simple binaries, we see that infrastructural thinking and the socialist scaffold remain active in the layers of urban life in these cities even with the political and institutional changes. The existing scaffold enlivened by its new components highlights how the underlying structure and logic of the scaffold and infrastructure-scale planning provided hidden stability, then and now.

The bureaucratic culture of the Communist regimes centralized decision-making, elevated managers and technocrats over designers, and kept the public out of debates by limiting their participation in planning processes dominated instead by experts. After 1989, wealthy and politically powerful individuals saw opportunities to use this existing system to control access to decision-makers, further their own financial interests, and continue to marginalize the public and their community concerns. In his new book, *The Legacies of Totalitarianism: A Theoretical Framework*, political philosopher Aviezer Tucker describes this elite, made up primarily of former Communist Party members, as "indifferent to democracy" with a preference for "a system of economic inequality and a clientelistic social model, the rule of well-connected individuals intertwined with the state from which they appropriated assets and to which they passed on liabilities."[81] For example, architectural regulations and planning decisions in Czech cities are still not subject to public comment; requests are processed through a closed bureaucratic review that allows owners to negotiate directly with the representatives of the state.

In this sense, many people who rejected communism in part for its failure to protect individual liberties have been disappointed to find that state socialism turned out to be an ideal training ground for future capitalist elites who learned to approach the city as a space of negotiation among elites with

political, material and financial capital. The transition to a democratic political system and market capitalism changed the mechanisms through which people earned this capital, but the legacies of socialism meant that many people who controlled capital before 1989 were able to convert this to personal wealth in the new system.[82] The scandal-ridden privatization schemes in the Czech Republic, which dispersed state-owned resources to individual people through vouchers and other methods, were one way that an entrenched elite manipulated the process in their favor.[83]

During this time, much of the economic discussion across the political spectrum in the region was flavored by neoliberalism. In popular usage, this term refers to center right, pro-business, pro-growth strategies that real estate developers, city governments, and politicians wield in their efforts to turn urban spaces into financial opportunities for themselves and their allies, and at the same time, improve quality of life in cities, even if this is available only to a small segment of the population. Discussed as the antidote to the stagnation and centralized control of communism, neoliberal strategies brought an infusion of international capital, real estate speculation, and consumer culture into the countries. It also appeared to take decision-making power away from the reviled centralized authority and give more agency to individuals; whether or not this occurred depended on the particular location and its mix of people and economic conditions.

Through these changes, the stagnation of late communism and the exuberance of the neoliberal policies of the last decade are linked. Socialist urbanity, with its hierarchies of powers created through control of resources and its establishment of infrastructures for future growth, made it possible for neoliberalism to re-inhabit the socialist scaffold by identifying and controlling its primary assets. Therefore the socialist city exists within the contemporary neoliberal city as a framework of spatial relations and organizing principles that are being put to new uses by the elite, and which still utilizes the city's integrated infrastructures.

In the Czech Republic, even the choice of a new President signaled something about this change. The first post-communist President, the well-known dissident poet and playwright Václav Havel, was succeeded in 2003 by Václav Klaus, a rightwing libertarian economist, Euro-sceptic, and co-founder of

the country's leading center-right party. He opened the country to international investors looking for opportunities in the region's emerging markets and soon new twenty-four-hour supermarkets appeared, along with shopping malls, luxury condominiums, and speculative office buildings. Sporadic development of these types of real estate projects in the largest cities in the 1990s led to a nationwide building boom funded largely by international investors in the years before the 2008-2009 crash.

Sociologists Gil Eyal and Johanna Bockmann elucidated much the same argument with respect to debates among economists working before, during and after communism. In a 2002 article, they started with the question of why "neoliberal ideas and policy recommendations ha[d] been adopted so rapidly, and almost unanimously, in post-1989 Eastern Europe."[84] They argued that economic discourse as far back as the 1920s established the terms on which capitalism and communism would be debated. Using Bruno Latour's concepts of networks and translation to explain how a group of economists working in the state research apparatus extended their reach after the end of communism, among them the future president Václav Klaus, they argued that what appeared to be the passive diffusion of western neoliberalism into Eastern Europe was something else:

> Since institutional forms or scientific artifacts are networks of relations, what may seem
> as diffusion might be better construed as a lengthening of the network in order to
> mobilize crucial new resources needed to reproduce it or to protect it from attacks. [This
> happens through] 'translation' – meaning the ability of network builders to devise an
> interpretation that aligns their interests with the network's new recruits, whose support
> and resources are crucial for its survival.[85]

In the economics sphere, the network builders who gained political power after 1989 used their communist-era stance against state socialism to amass private wealth and participate in the early building of capitalist structures.

As Eyal and Bockmann showed, the critics, who operated as opposition voices within the official sphere of state-run institutes, ended up being the victors in the sense of rigging the system in their own favor after the fall of the communist regimes. This wealth brought them social and political power,

therefore "lengthening" their network and "mobilizing" new sources of financial capital from outside investors to reinforce their positions. The actors within this network were not changing much, especially outside of Prague where many former Communists protected their elite status and gained power from winning over new "recruits"—both ambitious locals and international investors. To say this another way, the transformation of Czech and Slovak cities through neoliberal strategies was not the overtaking of the old regime by western experts who brought capitalism to a place where it did not exist (as was commonly believed), but rather the success of an entrenched elite who adopted this new narrative to further their own goals. In this sense, the former Czechoslovakia is another case study for David Harvey's argument that neoliberalism is not a "utopian project" to reorganize international capitalism, but rather "a political scheme aimed at reestablishing the conditions for capital accumulation and the restoration of class power."[86]

If we take Latour's concept of "lengthening of the network" to the question of urban space and urban form, it brings us right back to the socialist scaffold. He described the mobilization of "crucial new resources needed to reproduce [the network] or to protect it from attacks."[87] This is an apt description of the resilience and longevity of the socialist scaffold in the region's cities. The new "recruits," an emerging network of real estate developers, international banking managers, and local corporate executives and politicians (some of whom came to their wealth under suspicious circumstances during privatization) have replaced the monolithic group of Communist Party apparatchiks of the previous system. Importantly, many of the same people in their local contexts were the Communist Party operatives, and they remained network builders who used the new system "to devise an interpretation that aligns their interests with the network's new recruits." These network builders still have significant influence on local planning decisions, now as successful capitalists with the additional financial capital of international investment behind them. Thus the socialist scaffold survives as a set of relations at the infrastructure scale that allows this new development to happen.

Conclusion

The combination of infrastructural thinking, the socialist scaffold, and the notion of the city as a single entity operating at many scales goes a long way in defining something new about the specificity of the socialist city. Recognizing the agency of the socialist scaffold and seeing it as an active, rather than a reactive, presence that continues to influence urbanity in contemporary cities illustrates the temporal dimension of the argument. The qualitative methodology opens new debates about the socialist city and its legacies that focus on the material and spatial consequences of second world urbanity. Moving away from the Cold War binaries that pitted capitalism and communism, East and West, First World and Second World against each other, the socialist city emerges instead as a complex series of layers of political, social, economic, and environmental elements that are organized both according to the deep structure of the place and its ephemeral expression in the present.

Although the study of the socialist city will always be historically contingent and differentiated in national and regional contexts, especially as more case studies continue to be published, the analytical frameworks of infrastructural thinking and the socialist scaffold provide a context in which the socialist city can be more precisely described. This clarity comes both in terms of identifying the uniqueness of individual cases, and also those units of comparison that are shared across the region, but sometimes hidden by what appear to be insurmountable differences. The essay confronts the challenge of finding a unifying typology by pushing aside aspects of implementation and human-scale inhabitation in favor of an ideological framing of the aspirations of these cities in the context of the project of 'building socialism.'

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[1] Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
[2] Kiril Stanilov, ed. *The Post-Socialist City: Urban Form and Space Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe after Socialism* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 3.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] R.A. French and F. E. Ian Hamilton, eds. *The Socialist City: Spatial Structure and Urban Policy* (Chichester; New York; Brisbane; Toronto: Wiley & Sons, 1979).

[6] Gregory Andrusz, Michael Harloe and Ivan Szelenyi, ed. *Cities After Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies* (Oxford; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996); Stanilov, *The Post-Socialist City,* 2007. See also, Sonia Hirt and Kiril Stanilov, *Twenty Years of Transition: The Evolution of Urban Planning in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union, 1989-2009* (Nairobi: UN Habitat, 2009).

[7] Examples include Tarik Cyril Amar, *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv: A Borderland City between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2015); Heather DeHaan, *Stalinist City Planning: Professionals, Performance, and Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); Krisztina Féhervàry, *Politics in Color and Concrete: Socialist Materialities and the Middle Class in Hungary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Steven E. Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life after Stalin* (Washington, D.C./Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Vladimir Kulić, Maroje Mrduljaš, and Wolfgang Thaler, *Modernism In-Between: The Mediatory Architectures of Socialist Yugoslavia* (Berlin: Jovis, 2012); Brigitte Le Normand, *Designing Tito's Capital: Urban Planning, Modernism, and Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014); Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949–56* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2013); Viràg Molnár, *Building the State: Architecture, Politics, and State Formation in Postwar Central Europe* (London: Routledge, 2013); Henrieta Moravčíková, *Bratislava: Atlas sídlisk 1950-1995/ Bratislava: Atlas of Mass Housing 1950-1995* (Bratislava: Slovart, 2012); Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Mark B. Smith, *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2010); Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010); Christine Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2015); and Kimberly Elman Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1960* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

[8] On the challenge of comparative urban research, see Jennifer Robinson, "Cities in a World of Cities: The Comparative Gesture," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 35, no. 1 (January 2011): 1-23.

[9] Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity*; Kimberly Zarecor, "Czechoslovakia's Model Housing Developments: Modern Architecture for the Socialist Future," in *Sanctioning Modernism: Architecture and the Making of Postwar Identities*, ed. Vladimir Kulić, Timothy Parker, and Monica Penick (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); Kimberly Zarecor, "Infrastructural Thinking: Urban Housing in Former Czechoslovakia from the Stalin Era to EU Accession," in *The Housing Question: Tensions, Continuities, and Contingencies in the Modern City*, ed. Edward Murphy and Najib Hourani (London; New York: Ashgate, 2013); Kimberly Zarecor and Eva Špačková, "Czech Panelaks are Disappearing, But the Housing Estates Remain," *Architektura & urbanizmus*, 46:3-4 (2012): 288-301; Kimberly Zarecor, "Socialist Cities after Socialism: The Past, Present, and Future of Postwar Housing in the Czech Republic," *East European Politics and Society* 26:3 (August 2012): 486-509; Kimberly Zarecor, "Bigness of Another Sort: The Challenge of a Mass Housing Inventory in the Czech Republic," in *Docomomo E-Proceedings 4*, "Postwar Mass Housing – East + West, Conference 7-11 September 2011," ed. Carmen Popescu and Miles Glendinning. Docomomo, 2012. http://sites.ace.ed.ac.uk/docomomoiscul/publications/e-proceedings-4/.

[10] For a discussion of methodological constructions of the "post-" period in the social science literature, see Aviezer Tucker, *The Legacies of Totalitarianism: A Theoretical Framework* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-23.

[11] For an excellent overview of analytical approaches to the question of the socialist and post-socialist city in sociology, see Judit Bodnár, *Fin de Millénaire Budapest: Metamorphoses of Urban Life*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

[12] Sonia Hirt, "Whatever Happened to the (Post)socialist City?," *Cities*, vol. 32 (July 2013): 29. Hirt also questions whether or not the stage of urban development following the socialist city can even be described by the singular concept of the "post-socialist city" and suggests, instead, that there is a "splintering [happening] in the post-socialist urban world" with various "sub-types" emerging that are aligned more with varieties of capitalism than post-socialism, a further contrast with the idea that the socialist city is still a part of these cities, p. 37.

[13] Examples include cities in the Miskolc region in Hungary, Most in the Czech Republic, or the post-industrial cities of East Germany such as Halle. There is also the phenomenon of Russian 'monotowns' that are still subsidized by the government to stop their collapse, but these subsidies are at risk in the current economic climate. See Stephen Crowley, "Monotowns and the Political Economy of Industrial Restructuring in Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 32:5 (2016): 397-422.

[14] I am indebted to Daria Bocharnikova and Steven E. Harris for the framework of 'Second World urbanity,' one of the methodological underpinnings of this essay. They founded an international research network in 2012 called Second World Urbanity and this essay further develops material first presented at a conference sponsored by the network.

[15] Countries include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, East Germany, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

[16] Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*, 9.

[17] Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity*.

[18] Scholars who have made major contributions to understanding the design, construction, and patterns of everyday life in socialist cities include Heather DeHaan, Krisztina Féhérváry, Steven E. Harris, Kate Lebow, Vladimir Kulić, Virág Molnár, Eli Rubin, and Christine Varga-Harris.

[19] Zarecor, "Infrastructural Thinking," 57-78.

[20] Terminology in this essay typically uses 'socialist' to refer to the cities, 'state socialist' for the economic system, 'communist' to refer generally to the countries and ideology in the region, and 'Communist Parties' to refer to the political parties in power. Scholars use all of these terms and there is no consensus about correct usage.

[21] Robinson, 6. The term "individualizing" is credited to Charles Tilly from his book, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984).

[22] Robinson, 13-14, 4-5.

[23] Robinson, 14.

[24] Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity*, 113-223.

[25] On the same time period in the capitalist context, see Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[26] Zarecor, "Infrastructural Thinking," 245-246.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Bart Johnson and Kristina Hill, ed., *Ecology and Design: Frameworks For Learning* (Washington; Covelo; London: Island Press, 2002), 15-16.

[29] Ibid., 16.

[30] Anne Whiston Spirn, "Ecological Urbanism: A Framework for the Design of Resilient Cities (2014)," in *The Ecological Design and Planning Reader*, ed. Forster O. Ndubisi, (Washington; Covelo; London: Island Press, 2014), 565. There term enduring also appears here, in what Spirn describes as the "enduring context" of a city.

[31] Merriam-Webster, "Infrastructure," http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/infrastructure.

[32] For case studies on planning practices, see De Haan, *Stalinist City Planning*, 2013; Le Normand, *Designing Tito's Capital*, 2014; Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City*, 2010; Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity*, 2011.

[33] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[34] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 30.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 259.

[37] On the history of Comecon, see Jenny Brine, ed. *Comecon: The Rise and Fall of an International Socialist Organization* (New Brunswick, NJ; London: Transaction Books, 1992).

[38] Smith, *Properties of Communists*, 117. Proto-communism refers to stage of development between socialism and communism. Khrushchev announced that communism was 20 years in the future in a 1961 speech, so Smith uses the terms socialism and proto-communism to discuss the consciousness desired in the microrayons.

[39] Catherine Cooke, "Beauty as a Route to 'the Radiant Future': Responses of Soviet Architecture," *Journal of Design History*, 10:2 (1997): 137-160.

[40] Juliana Maxim, "The Microrayon: The Organization of Mass Housing Ensembles, Bucharest, 1956-1967," in *Docomomo E-Proceedings* 4, ed. Popescu and Glendinning, 16.

[41] Juliana Maxim, "Mass Housing and Collective Experience: On the Notion of Microraion in Romania in the 1950s and 1960s," *The Journal of Architecture*, 14:1 (2009), 10.

[42] Maxim, "The Microrayon," 16. Maxim gives the limit at 10,000 for Romanian microraions. Mark B. Smith defines the Soviet microrayon as 5,000 to 20,000 people. Smith, *Property of Communists*, 116.

[43] Maxim, "The Microrayon," 16.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 17.

[46] Ibid., 18.

[47] The German word *Siedlung* also refers to the process of settlement and is used to refer to examples from the interwar period, like the Wiessenhof Siedlung in Stuttgart. In Czechoslovakia, the term *sídliště*, translated literally as "the place of settlement," applied mainly to post-1945 industrialized housing developments.

[48] For example, lists of individual housing developments in Prague including number of units, population and area are found in Alexandra Miksánková, *Výstavby Prahy 1945-1980 II.Díl* (Prague: Pražská informační služba, 1981). The smallest *sídliště* had 1,400 residents, the largest 79,000.

[49] On the competition, see Sona Stephan Hoisington, "'Ever Higher': The Evolution of the Project for the Palace of Soviets," *Slavic Review* 62:1 (Spring 2003): 41-68.

[50] Zarecor, "Infrastructural Thinking."

[51] On the 1950s construction in the Ostrava region, see Martin Strakoš, *Nová Ostrava a její satelity: Kapitoly z dějin architektury 30.-50.let 20.století* (Ostrava: Národní památkový ústav, uzemní odborné pracoviště v Ostravě, 2010), 150-189; Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity*, 150-176.

[52] Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* (London: New Left Books, 1978).

[53] Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity*.

[54] Originally published as a series of articles for a German-lanuguage newspaper in 1872-1873, Engels published the complete text in a second edition as *Zur Wohnungsfrage* in 1887. For a complete English-language translation of the second edition, see Friedrich Engels, *The Housing Question*, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/housing-question/. On the text, see Edward Murphy and Najib Hourani "Introduction: Housing Questions Past, Present, and Future," in *Housing Question: Tensions, Continuities, and Contingencies in the Modern City*, Edward Murphy and Najib Hourani, ed. (London; New York: Ashgate, 2013), 1-21.

[55] On the Khrushchev period in the Soviet Union, see Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*, 2013; Smith, *Property of Communists,* 2010; Susan E. Reid, "Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home." *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 47:1/2 (2006): 227-68; and Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home*, 2015.

[56] On these cities, see Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast "Nowa Huta, Eisenhüttenstadt and Ostrava-Poruba in Early State Socialism: The Proletarianization and Ruralization of New Cities," in *Mastery and Lost Illusions: Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe*, ed. Stanislav Holubec, Włodzimierz Borodziej, and Joachim Puttkamer (Munich: De Gryuter Oldenbourg, 2014), 121-137; Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast, "In the Shadow of the Factory: Steel Towns in Postwar Eastern Europe," in *Urban Machinery: Inside Modern European Cities*, Mikael Hård and Thomas J. Misa, ed. (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2008), 187-210; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 1995 ; Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, 2013; Christina Lenart, "The Urban Transformations of Post-Socialist Dunaújváros," *Journal of Space Syntax,* 4:2 (2013): 197-220.

[57] On types of Soviet new cities, see Kathryn L. Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Paul Josephson, *New Atlantis Revisited: Akademgorodok, the Siberian City of Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2011); and Steven T. Usdin, *Engineering Communism: How Two Americans Spied for Stalin and Founded the Soviet Silicon Valley* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

[58] Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast has done extensive comparative research about Ostrava and the other steel cities, published primarily in German. In English, see Jajeśniak-Quast "Nowa Huta, Eisenhüttenstadt and Ostrava-Poruba in Early State Socialism," 2014, and "In the Shadow of the Factory," 2008. See also Zarecor, "Infrastructural Thinking"; Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity*, 2011.

[59] On Ostrava in the early twentieth century, see Martin Jemelka, "The Ostrava Industrial Agglomeration in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: Where the Urban Countryside Met the Rural Town," in *Mastery and Lost Illusions*, 71-98.

[60] On Ostrava's population trends since 1869, see Igor Ivan and Jiří Horák, "Population Changes Caused by Industrialization and Deindustrialization – Comparison of Ostrava and Glasgow," *Geografický časopis/Geographical Journal*, 63:2 (2011): 113-132.

[61] Petr Rumpel and Ondřej Slach, "Je Ostrava 'smršťujícím se městem'? (Is Ostrava a Shrinking City?)," *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 48:5 (2012): 859–878.

[62] On Ostrava as an agglomeration, see Radovan Lipus, *Scénologie Ostravy* (Prague: KANT, 2006).

[63] Ivan and Horák, "Population Changes," 2011.

[64] See Lubor Hruška Tvrdý, *Industriální město v postindustriální společnosti*, 1. díl (Ostrava: VŠB-TU Ostrava, 2010). Subsequent volumes in 2011, 2012, and 2013.

[65] Zarecor, "Socialist Neighborhoods after Socialism."

[66] Thomas Hall & Sonja Vidén, "The Million Homes Programme: A Review of the Great Swedish Planning Project," *Planning Perspectives*, 20:3 (2005), 302.

[67] Ibid., 303-304.

[68] Ibid.

[69] His recent publications include: Lukasz Stanek, "Architects from Socialist Countries in Ghana (1957-1967): Modern Architecture and Mondialisation," *Society of Architectural Historians Journal*, 74:4 (2015), 416-442; Lukasz Stanek, "Mobilities of Architecture in the Late Cold War: From Socialist Poland to Kuwait, and Back," *International Journal of Islamic Architecture*, 4:2 (2015), 365-398; Lukasz Stanek "Miastoprojekt Goes Abroad: The Transfer of Architectural Labour from Socialist Poland to Iraq (1958-1989)." *Journal of Architecture*, 17:3 (2012), 361-386.

[70] Anna Alekseyeva, "The Uniquely Socialist City: From Modernism to Socialist Realism," (paper presented at the conference, "Circulation, Translation, Transition" at the Estonian Academy of Fine Arts, April 2014).

[71] Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

[72] Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, "Kitchens as Technology and Politics: An Introduction," in *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology, and European Users,* ed. Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann (Cambridge; London: MIT Press, 2009), 3.

[73] Ibid., 7.

[74] Some new monographs and collections on European cases include Sheila Crane, *Mediterranean Crossroads: Marseille and Modern Architecture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Kenny Cuypers, *The Social Project: Housing Postwar France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Stephanie Zeier Pilat, *Reconstructing Italy: The Ina-Casa Neighborhoods of the Postwar Era* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2014); Nicole C. Rudolph, *At Home in Postwar France: Modern Mass Housing and the Right to Comfort* (Berlin: Berghahn Books, 2015); and Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete and Dirk van den Heuvel, ed. *Architecture and the Welfare State* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2015).

[75] Hall & Vidén, "The Million Homes Programme," 304-309.

[76] Smith, *Properties of Communists*, 117.

[77] Ibid. Smith describes this period as a critical junction between a previous idea of a neighborhood-scale housing district, the kvartal, that he associates with Stalinism and examples from the West, and the emergence of the microrayon as a fully socialist type. On kvartals and microrayons, see also Juliana Maxim, "Bucharest: The City Transfigured" in *Sanctioning Modernism: Architecture and the Making of Postwar Identities*, 11-36.

[78] Mark B. Smith, *Properties of Communists*, 121.

[79] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 1995. The book's subtitle is "Stalinism as a Civilization."

[80] Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, 2013.

[81] Tucker, *Totalitarianism*, 22.

[82] On practices for obtaining wealth in the transition period, see Ibid., esp. 24-57.

[83] See Michal Mejstrik, ed. *The Privatization Process in East-Central Europe: Evolutionary Process of Czech Privatization* (New York: Springer, 1997).

[84] Johanna Bockmann and Gil Eyal, "Eastern Europe as a Laboratory of Economic Knowledge: The Transnational Roots of Neo-liberalism," *American Journal of Sociology* 108:2 (September 2002), 310-352.

[85] Bockmann and Eyal, "Eastern Europe as a Laboratory," 314. Quoting Latour, *Science in Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1987), 108.

[86] David Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610 (2007), 28-29.

[87] Bockmann and Eyal, "Eastern Europe as a Laboratory," 314.