



**HAL**  
open science

## Towards Banalization ? Trans-forming the Legacies of the Post-Socialist City

Lydia Coudroy de Lille, Miléna Guest

► **To cite this version:**

Lydia Coudroy de Lille, Miléna Guest. Towards Banalization ? Trans-forming the Legacies of the Post-Socialist City. Alfrun Kliems, Marina Dmitrieva. The Post-Socialist City. Continuity and Change in Urban Space and Imagery, Jovis Diskurs, pp.34-51, 2010. halshs-00594949

**HAL Id: halshs-00594949**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00594949>**

Submitted on 15 Apr 2024

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

This is the authors' version of the chapter of a book.  
 Coudroy de Lille L., Guest M., « Trans-forming the legacies of post-socialist city : towards « banalization » ? » in Dmitrieva Marina & Kliems Alfrun, *The Post-Socialist City* (Ed. allemand). Manuscript written in March 2009.

## Trans-forming the legacies of the post-socialist city: towards «banalization»?

Pr. Lydia COUDROY de LILLE  
 Université de Lyon (Lyon 2)  
 UMR 5600 Environnement Ville Société  
[Lydia.coudroydelille@univ-lyon2.fr](mailto:Lydia.coudroydelille@univ-lyon2.fr)

Dr. Milena GUEST  
 Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Normandie  
 UMR 5600 Environnement Ville Société  
[Milena.guest@wanadoo.fr](mailto:Milena.guest@wanadoo.fr)

### Table des matières

Introduction .....	2
1. From the socialist to the post-socialist city .....	3
2. Desacralization of communist legacies: some figures of “banalization” .....	4
2.1. A “minimal” banalization.....	4
2.2. Post-socialist chaos producing banalization.....	6
2.3. Is the socialist realism soluble in the market economy ? .....	9
3. After the banalization: the patrimonialization? .....	9
3.1. Tabula rasa: the political and economical foundations of demolitions in the post-socialist city.....	10
3.2. Building a contemporary patrimony.....	16
a) Towards an appropriation of socialist legacies .....	16
b) Socialist legacies as tourism products: towards a "hyper-normalization"? .....	17
Conclusion.....	17

### Table des figures

Figure 1 : The City of Truth in front of the House of the Party, Sofia.....	5
Figure 2 : The Largoto Square, Sofia. ....	6
Figure 3: The kiosks on the Defilad Square, Warsaw. ....	7
Figure 4 : The supermarket on the Defilad Square, Warsaw. ....	7
Figure 5 : Advertising on the Constitution Square, Warsaw.....	8
Figure 6: The Kino Moskwa shot in 1981, Warsaw. ....	11
Figure 7 : The Silver Screen Building, instead of the Moskwa Cinema, Warsaw. ....	12
Figure 8 : The statues of lions, remaining of the Moskwa cinema, Warsaw. ....	12
Figure 9: The Supersam, Warsaw. ....	13
Figure 10: The Plac Unii Lubelskiej without Supersam, Warsaw. ....	14
Figure 11: The Waste Party in front of the Dimitrov Mausoleum, Sofia.....	15
Figure 12 : New Symbols, Sofia. ....	15

The schism is devoid of sense out of reference to any previous state: the absolutely New is unintelligible, even as a novelty<sup>1</sup>.

Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, tome 2, «La configuration dans le récit de fiction», Paris, Ed. du Seuil, 1984, p. 44

## Introduction

The city of Berlin has recently proposed a new attraction for tourists: an audio-guide allows them to follow the tracks of the former Berlin Wall, which had disappeared. Indeed, the need for new plots in the inner-city, the reconstruction of the wall on the right place had made this scar invisible, which plunged most of tourists into confusion. This kind of disappearance of material elements belongs to the ordinary evolution of the urban morphology. But sometimes, it raises basic questions about the link between a society and its territory. This is exactly what has been happening in post-socialist cities for the last 20 years. Indeed, there are in these cities, and among them above all in the capital cities emblematic, relevant monuments or buildings which purpose was to exalt the regime's grandeur. They were "monuments such as our enemies could not imagine, even in their dreams" (Kirov<sup>2</sup>).

This paper aims to question the transformation of socialist places. The transformation of former socialist cities was mostly analysed in the literature in the light of globalization, social polarization, housing privatization<sup>3</sup>. We will try to observe the transformation of post-socialist cities according to the etymology of this word. To transform means to give a form to an object, or to change it. This can be done by an action on its material morphology, but also through an action on its signification, its social, cultural, social use. The urban objects we are going to analyse are the most relevant witnesses of the socialist period of Warsaw and Sofia. Among the construction of the period 1945-90, some buildings, monuments, houses were designed in order to express the magnificence and the power of the political order and the values of the new society : they were elements of the "symbolic policies" of the socialist regimes, such as hymns, flags, or political celebrations and parades<sup>4</sup>. They were in a sense exceptional. Our purpose is to analyse a trend of transformation of these urban places that we will call banalization.

The banalization of a place is a kind of transformation, that can be material and/or functional. Our hypothesis is that banalization occurs through a double process: a process of loss of ideological value (the socialist one), of monumentalism, of visibility, and a "loss of tragedy". And a process of gaining: they are getting other functions, other values, a greater social

---

<sup>1</sup> Le schisme est dénué de sens hors de toute référence à quelque état antérieur : l'absolument Nouveau est simplement inintelligible, même à titre de nouveauté.

<sup>2</sup> Sergueï Kirov, speech for the first Soviet Congress, 1922, quoted in KOPP A., *Ville et révolution*, Paris, Point Seuil, 1975, p.293.

<sup>3</sup> Enyedi, G. (Ed) (1998), *Social change and urban restructuring in eastern and central Europe*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 287 p., Hamilton, F. E. I., Andrews, K. D. & Pichler-Milanovic, N. (2005), *Transformation of cities in Central and Eastern Europe. Towards globalization*, New York. United Nations University Press, 519 p., Tsenkova, S. (2006), *Urban mosaic of post-socialist Europe: space, institution, policy*. Physica Verlag, 400 p.

<sup>4</sup> Ory P. (2006), « Politiques symboliques : à l'est du nouveau », *La Nouvelle Alternative*, pp. 7-10.

acceptance, a kind of lightness. Of course, the word of banalization that we are proposing is subjective. But we do not give it an axiological dimension, considering that it is bad or good. We will try to show how in post-socialist countries, the urban landscape is less and less “socialist”, and according to what processes. Thus, we will raise the question of the cultural and political debates around this. Thanks to the comparison between two capital cities, Warsaw and Sofia, we will ask if the trends of banalization or “counter-banalization” are general processes or if they still depend of national context<sup>5</sup>.

## 1. From the socialist to the post-socialist city

The political, social, and economic processes which are going on in former socialist countries lead to a kind of “normalization” of the structure of the state and of the society. The fall of the socialist regimes brought also the erosion of some social practices. Before analyzing them, we should recall which were the components of the socialist identity of the cities.

Talking about the socialist city, we refer to two categories, not exactly identical, but which meet together in some aspects: an ideal city, whose characteristics were defined through an ideological and political literature; the second one is the city of the real socialism which was analysed throughout social sciences, in its material shapes, its sociological and economical characteristics. We will focus on the second one in this paper. From French and Hamilton’s famous book<sup>6</sup>, but also from Enyedy’s works about the socialist city, we know that the main features of the socialist urbanization led to the following elements<sup>7</sup> :

- at a macro-scale, the cycle of urbanization in socialist Europe differed from what happened in Western Europe. The fastest cycle of urban growth begun after the second world war, and was related to the needs of industrialization. Thus, not only the tempo, but also, the location of urbanization fitted with the demand of the biggest national plants.

- at a micro-scale, we can observe in the socialist city an specific organization of urban densities: on the one hand, urban densities are lower than in West European cities, thanks to the numerous parks, and the high consumption of space by industrial zones, transport infrastructures, on a land without price. On the other hand, the highest population densities occur in the first periphery, because of the presence of large housing estates.

- urban segregation did not disappear, despite the promise of a city without class struggle. But the social building and allowance of dwellings produced another feature of social division of space: older people in the inner-city, families with young children in the new housing estates

- the visual identity of the socialist city was composed also by a range of monuments, buildings, which gave an ideological signification to the landscape. Most of them were erected during the first decade of the socialist period, and especially under the reign of the socialist realism in the culture in Central Europe, that is 1949-1955.

The transition to the market economy had great effects on the urban landscapes. Through a quick process (the Choc Therapy) or gradually, this shift considerably increased the need for services, especially in the capital cities. Furthermore, the competition for space occurred at a

---

<sup>5</sup> The authors have been studying those two cities for a long time, as geographers. The material used for this paper gathers a bibliographical and a several yars empirical knowledge about Sofia and Warsaw.

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton, F. E. I. & French, R. A. (1979), *The socialist city*, Chichester. John Wiley & Sons, 541 p.

<sup>7</sup> Enyedi, G. (1996), Urbanization under socialism in Andrusz, G., Harloe, M. & Szelényi, I. (Eds), *Cities after socialism. Urban and regional change and conflicts in post-socialist societies*, Londres, Blackwell, pp. 100-118.

time when the land regained a price. Hence a densification of the inner-city, and sometimes the formation of central business districts, such as in Warsaw. These economic and urban transformations took place in a context of political decentralization<sup>8</sup>. The municipalities, entirely self-governing their territory since 1990 could not always face the pressure of private investors, their need for land, offices, infrastructures. In the 1990 decade, the adaptation of the city to the market economy proved to be a leading process, having the priority over other topics, such as the destiny of socialist legacies. A new legal framework was set up through the privatization of economy, and the architectural evolution of cities is partially under the control of western investors; this adaptation did not fit exactly in the same way in each post-socialist country<sup>9</sup> but the fact is that it produced what we can define as a process of banalization.

## 2. Desacralization of communist legacies: some figures of “banalization”

The founding myths of communist regimes were built on a reinterpretation of history, which is thus difficult to share, because it is too problematic. This is why the most political monuments and representational statues were soon destroyed because they had become intolerable. But many pieces of socialist architecture remained after 1990, passing through a process of neutralization, of banalization. This process sometimes affects the architectural shape itself, but sometimes the mere use of it. The banalization of a monument or of an urban site may be the result of an expressed political and social decision, or just the result of several dissociated actions: post socialist societies dealt with their urban legacies in many different ways. Are these a transgression, a kind of desacralization of inherited forms, or should they be seen as a mere «digression»? Some concrete cases of transformation of communist heritages will be taken in Warsaw and Sofia, and treated as different modalities of banalization. Some of these case studies are emblematic places which might be considered as "exceptional", whereas others are more "ordinary" (because they were reproduced massively in urban spaces for everyday life and common use).

### 2.1. A “minimal” banalization

Just during or after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the most symbolic elements (Lenin statues, red stars) on the roof or on the front of public buildings were generally destroyed or removed during public demonstrations. But the official and administrative buildings remained untouched and still function for administrative purposes, once they have lost their symbolic attributes. Those which were built in the era of the socialist realism still have a visual identity easily recognizable, but their symbolism gradually faded, and they became more acceptable.

Designed to become the architectural model of a new political order, the **Party House in Sofia** (1948-1954) represented the ambitions of new political power. It is not simply an emblematic building, but a symbolic estate which transformed the organization of the whole city under the plan of L. Tonev. It was built after several architectural competitions\_in 1944 with the participation of N. Baranov, architect of the Lenin mausoleum in Moscow, then in 1945 under the direction of architecture and urbanism in Sofia with the consultation of Soviet members of

---

<sup>8</sup> Coudroy de Lille L. (2004), Métropolisation et démocratie locale à Varsovie in Rey, V., Coudroy de Lille L. & Boulineau, E. (Eds), *L'élargissement de l'Union Européenne: réformes territoriales en Europe centrale et orientale*, Paris, L'Harmattan, pp. 133-149.

<sup>9</sup> Alexandrova-Guest, M. (2006), *Habiter Sofia au tournant du XXIème siècle. Essai sur l'aménagement des espaces urbains post-socialiste.*, Thèse de doctorat, ENS-LSH, 426 p.

the Academy of Architecture of the USSR, and finally in 1947. After this third competition the Party House was erected, approved by G. Dimitrov, who was then the Prime Minister<sup>10</sup>. This occurred in a particularly historic moment: the proclamation of the People's Republic of Bulgaria in September 1946 and the adoption of a new Constitution in 1947. The construction of the Party House represented an official celebration of the new system and participated in the legitimization of the new political power. The project of the architect P. Zlatev was ultimately adopted. In its totalitarian architecture - both in its forms, its symbols, and its the relation with the surroundings - the Party House overlooks on the west-side the walls of the ancient Roman city Serdica. The location is central, in continuity to the House of Commons and the Sveta Sofia and Alexander Nevski churches. Its front overlooks one of the oldest square of the city, the Largoto square (renamed Lenin at that time). In 1990 it was surrounded by the tents of the «City of the Truth»: the protest movement of the first Bulgarian so called “free elections” won by the Socialist Party .



**Figure 1 : The City of Truth in front of the House of the Party, Sofia  
MG, 1990**

---

<sup>10</sup> Palazova-Lebleu, D. (2005), La maison du Parti à Sofia : un prototype d'architecture totalitaire, in *Livraisons d'histoire de l'architecture*, n°10, pp. 137-146.

The social mobilisation claimed for the demolition of the mausoleum and people took off the Red Star from upon the Party House. The building has been set on fire (part of the archives has been destroyed). François Maspero recounts: “Two steps from the subway work adjourned *sine die*, the tower of the disused building in the Stalinist style – but a particularly massive, low-built, country-like style – had lost its red star. A helicopter had brought it to an unknown destination, waiting for better days<sup>11</sup>. The building was also vandalized and partially burned during demonstrations in 1990. Currently it accommodates various committees and working groups of the National Assembly.

The square is now undergoing further transformations: the construction of two buildings on the Largoto square for business purpose is under preparation. Furthermore, at the occidental extremity of the square the statue of Sophia was erected, exactly where the Lenin monument used to stand. The new Master Plan of Sofia 2007-2020 opens a breach in the occidental direction into the old Sofia and offers space for the development of a new CDB



Figure 2 : The Largoto Square, Sofia.  
MG, 2002.

## 2.2. Post-socialist chaos producing banalization

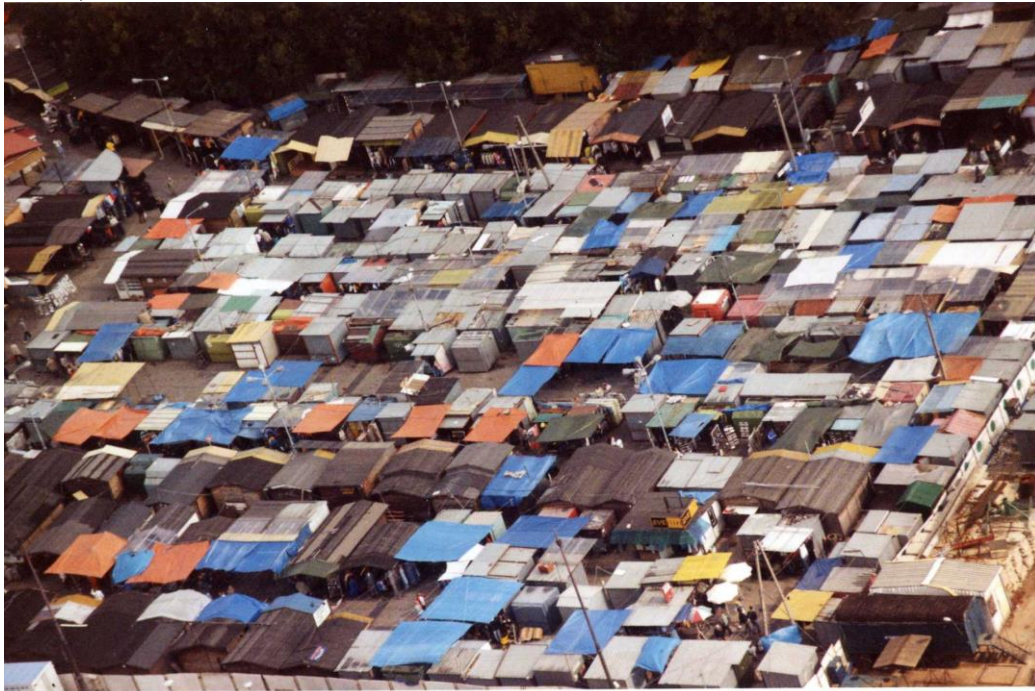
Nevertheless, very often, banalization does not concern the buildings themselves, but their surroundings. As we said, the lack of urban planning, the political decentralization at the benefit of the communes, and the need of space for offices and commercial activities created a high demand for land in the city core. As a result, a new feature of space appeared in the inner-city, which is often analysed as a spatial disorder, or even chaos, made of a plenty of functional buildings: offices, hotels, shops, advertising banners covering entire building fronts but also, especially at the beginning of the 1990s, numerous kiosks and boxes for individual businesses. The liberalization and privatization of the urban space did not exactly produced central business districts, but something similar both to a CBD and to an uncontrolled urbanization, not different from what occurs in non-developed countries<sup>12</sup>.

This is what happened to one of the largest open space in **Warsaw, the Defilad Square** (that is to say the Parades Square) which is in front of the Palace of Culture and Sciences. Planned in 1955, 250 meters long, this square was the most important public space in the capital of the People's Republic of Poland: not only military and political marches, but other major political events took place here. It was the scene of military repression during the marshall law in

<sup>11</sup> Maspero, F. (1997), *Balkans-Transit*, Paris. Le Seuil.

<sup>12</sup> Cieśla, S. (2000), Globalizacja i metropolizacja. Niektóre aspekty badań polskiej przestrzeni [Globalisation et métropolisation. Quelques aspects d'analyse de l'espace polonais], *Studia Regionalne i Lokalne*, vol. 4, n° 4, pp.23-36, Jałowicki, B. (2007), *Globalny świat metropolii [Le monde global des métropoles]*, Varsovie, Scholar, 183 p.

December 1981, of the mass celebrated by John Paul II in 1987. But starting in 1990, this empty space was suddenly invaded by hundreds of sellers, installed on the square and then in numerous kiosks).



**Figure 3: The kiosks on the Defilad Square, Warsaw.**  
LCL, 1997.



**Figure 4 : The supermarket on the Defilad Square, Warsaw.**  
LCL, 2009.



This “bazar“ economy was partially transferred to two big metallic warehouses which temporarily occupy the square. Meanwhile, one of them accommodated a supermarket, whose owner is now a very welfare businessman in Poland. Moratoria succeeded one after another, and these two unsightly hangars stood on the square until the end of the year 2008. Erection of kiosks, of commercial provisory buildings, of big advertising banners on the roof of the warehouses undoubtedly transformed the landscape around the Palace of Culture, whose basement was hidden; the open space itself disappeared under this commercial profusion. It lost its ideological signification under entirely new functions, and the landscape plainly reflected this new land use.



Figure 5 : Advertising on the Constitution Square, Warsaw.  
LCL, 2009

The accumulation of advertisements – much less controlled than in West European cities - in the urban landscape just around former politically symbolic places enhances the process of banalization: these banners and posters aim to sell goods and films with the same words, signs, slogans, and pictures than in any other metropolis. This banalization is carried by what the French architect David Mangin calls the “corporatization” or the “brandization”<sup>13</sup>: the shape of the contemporary city tends to be directly or in a roundabout way designed for the needs of corporate firms. In addition to this process of privatization *stricto sensu* there are the effects of globalization which find new markets for the international networks of shops, restaurants, etc. in such cities as Warsaw or Sofia.

---

<sup>13</sup> Mangin, D. (2004), *La ville franchisée. Formes et structures de la ville contemporaine*, Paris. Ed de la Villette, 398 p.

### **2.3. Is the socialist realism soluble in the market economy ?**

More often than not however, public buildings inherited from the former regime are recycled partly or in fully for other functions. The amounts of floor space which were devoted to administrative, cultural or political functions in the core of capital cities were very important. In the early 1990s, the budget for these activities had been reduced, and at the same time, private corporations were in search of offices to let. These square meters downtown were a precious resource before the boom of the real estate market, and some public buildings became partly occupied by private firms, which increased their profitability. Thus, the needs of the market economy led to the loss of ideological dimension of the most symbolic Stalinist buildings in the capital cities.

The **Palace of Culture opened in Sofia** in 1981, for the 1300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bulgaria. It is made of 13 halls, reaching altogether 5000 seats, on 8 floors (plus 3 underground levels). Until 1990, it was called after its initiator Ludmila Jivkova, Todor Jivkov's daughter. After 1990, one part was converted into shopping malls, higher levels continuing to host major cultural and economic events. In 2005, the Palace was even distinguished as the best conference centre in the Balkans.

The 230 meters high **Palace of Culture and Sciences in Warsaw** was built between 1952 and 1955 under the direction of the soviet architect Lev Rudniew. It was designed to be occupied by several public institutions such as the Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Marxism and Leninism, a cinema, theatres, the Youth Palace, a swimming pool, and a big congress hall. Facing the enormous costs of maintenance, the city of Warsaw decided to let a part of the office space to private institutions, such as banks, or a private university (1997).

It is the same for the building named the **Party House in Warsaw**, which of course fully lost its use after 1990. It is the seat of the Polish Stock Exchange since 1991.

These examples show how income derived from the commercial exploitation of the buildings allows to face up to the fees or their maintenance. Furthermore, the emblematic places of communism got a new identity through this functional shift. Can't we see there a silent ideological victory of capitalism? The communist experience and the place that ought to represent it lost their tragic dimension. Material legacies of the communist regime, which were supposed to embody the promise of a radical political change, are now desacralized, recycled.

### **3. After the banalization: the patrimonialization?**

Everyday in any given town, some houses or old factories are torn down because of their material stage, their low economic value or social use legitimates it. This is an ordinary process of reconstructing, which is possible when a system of economical, social, cultural and political agents agree on a common set of values and needs. In the early 1990s this allowed for the destruction of buildings from the 1940s or 1950s. But in the late 1990s, it seems that a part of the opinion has been turning to a more patrimonial attitude.

The question of political use of past often refers to a restorative action and to the importance that we attach to the setting-up of a consensual, indeed universal memory, which is questioned by Maurice Halbwachs<sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless, our intention is not to challenge the

---

<sup>14</sup> Halbwachs, M. (1994 [1925]), *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris. Albin Michel, Halbwachs, M. (1997 [1950]), *La mémoire collective*, Paris. Albin Michel.

foundations of this memory, but to shed light on the relations between different forces which institute the changing means of post-communist places. Behind the desire to develop and maintain some legacy and some places, the social and political issues of capturing symbolic and economic resources and appropriation of space have to be studied.

### **3.1. *Tabula rasa: the political and economical foundations of demolitions in the post-socialist city***

The context of systemic transformation is underpinned not only by a reversal of values, but also by the destruction of representative places. The removal of statues was a part of the dismantling of a political system, and can be treated as a historical turn. But some years later, buildings from the communist period were destroyed for technical, or mostly for economical reasons. Sometimes, they merely do not fit anymore to the symbolic and cultural values of the new elites and thus are destroyed<sup>15</sup>. Some of them occupied central locations, and had to make room for new investments. This occurred at the early stage, in the atmosphere of great indifference.

The Moskwa cinema, built in Warsaw in 1948, was an imposing object, because of the modernity of its design, of the large square in front of it, and of two lion statues at the bottom of the steps leading to the entrance. It was closed in the 1990s and demolished. Instead of the square and the cinema, a new investment took place. The new building, which is much banal, occupies the whole parcel: there is no open space any more. It contains offices, a shopping mall, and a multiplex cinema. The only remains of the former building are the two lions; but standing close to such an ordinary object, are hardly visible, deprived of any perspective and monumentality. The comments of Polish architects were very caustic – and this is understandable. They were intensified by the fact that the Moskwa cinema had been famous thanks to a political photo of it, taken just on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1981, the first day of the martial law. This day, Chris Niedenthal shot a photo of a tank standing in front of the Moskwa cinema, on a ground covered by snow; a big poster hangs on the front of the cinema, showing the title of a film: “Apocalypse now”... This photo was published in the Newsweek, was very famous at that time, and contributed to the tragic dimension of the Moskwa cinema – which was recalled when it was demolished.

---

<sup>15</sup> See the destruction in 2008 of the Rossija Hotel in Moscow, considered as « anachronistic » by the mayor Iuri Lujkov. Abitbol A (2008), « L’hôtel fantôme de la place Rouge », *Vingt-et-un*, janvier-mars 2009, pp. 124-135.



Figure 6: The Kino Moskwa shot in 1981, Warsaw.

Chris Niedenthal, 1981.



Figure 7 : The Silver Screen Building, instead of the Moskwa Cinema, Warsaw.  
LCL, 2009



Figure 8 : The statues of lions, remaining of the Moskwa cinema, Warsaw.  
LCL, 2009.

But a rather small group of specialists participated in this debate. In the 1990s, the Polish public was not so much worried by the removal of pieces of the “ordinary” city. Nevertheless, this has been evolving since the end of this decade, which shows the larger debate occurring around the case of a supermarket.

The first supermarket opened in Poland in 1962 in Warsaw; its name is Supersam (arch. Jerzy Hryniewiecki). Its architecture is an example of modernism, and when it was built, not only the concept of self service was entirely new in the country, but the building's design as well; a very high and suspended roof provided an imposing volume, and much light. The supermarket was closed for technical reasons of security, and its last owner, an investment fund, did not try to restore it; the building was demolished in 2007 in order to build a shopping mall.



Figure 9: The Supersam, Warsaw.  
E. Kupiecki, 1973.



Figure 10: The Plac Unii Lubelskiej without Supersam, Warsaw. LCL, 2009.

The Dimitrov Mausoleum was built in one week in 1949, according to the project of G. Ovcharov and R. Ribarov. It was used as a tribune for major political events. In 1990 the «City of Truth», that is a set of tents and political posters brought by political activists and citizens took place around the mausoleum and the Party House, to protest against the falsification and the manipulations of the first Bulgarian "free" elections for nearly half a century. The elections in autumn 1989, lost by the opposition and won by Bulgarian Socialist Party (PSB) provoked a genuine social mobilization oriented against two targets: the Mausoleum and the red star on the Party House. The PSB was forced to appoint a special commission to decide of their fate<sup>16</sup>. The mausoleum was emptied in September 1990 after a lengthy public debate, presented by the media as «a civil war of symbolic interpretations». This "war" affected other monuments, such as the Lenin one, the monument of the Soviet Army, and others. Some people intended to overcome a legacy built on death or on traumatic moments of national history. Others, quoting the example of the Pantheon in Paris or even the mausoleum of Franco in Spain – which is rather ironical from a historical point of view – proposed to preserve the empty mausoleum. Finally, Dimitrov's body was given back to his family. Just the day after, the inhabitants of the «City of the Truth» organized a "waste-party" (*sic*): at the front of the tribune they gathered different objects (books, statuettes, flags) from their common past.

<sup>16</sup> GRADEV, V. (1992), Le mausolée de Dimitrov, *Communications*, n° 55, pp.77-88



Figure 11: The Waste Party in front of the Dimitrov Mausoleum, Sofia. MG, 1990.

What then with the mausoleum? Through a competition, the architects suggested to transform it into a modern ruin partially destroyed, in a park gathering the best achievements of the socialist realistic art, into a pantheon of all victims of oppression (Turkish yoke, fascism, totalitarianism), or into a National Museum warehouse. Finally, the mausoleum was dynamited in September 1999, before the official visit of the U.S. President Bill Clinton. For some, the disappearance of the mausoleum meant a great step forwards; for others, it was seen as a mistake, because they identify it to a deny of history; thus it could not help the Bulgarians in the construction of their history and common memory. One part of the Welow Square (the former square of September 9<sup>th</sup> 1944) was transformed into a parking. Large advertising posters for whisky took the place of the mausoleum in 2000. Recently, in summer, a stage has been erected for a world festival of folklore dance.



Figure 12 : New Symbols, Sofia. MG, 2000.



This cathartic destruction of the mausoleum can be interpreted as a release of this central open space, thus a possibility for a better acceptance. The fact is that the destruction was accomplished quite late, in 1999, at a time when strong feelings had already subsided. In the two cases presented in Warsaw the objects were more neutral, and strongly related to the memory of the everyday life. But their destruction could have also carried an intense debate.

### **3.2. Building a contemporary patrimony**

#### **a) Towards an appropriation of socialist legacies**

Socialist legacies, under the political and above all economic pressure, are fragile. But recently, since the beginning of this century, it seems that we are facing a turn: after an attitude of lack of concern for this architecture there emerged some consciousness that it can be considered a common patrimony, and that a part of this patrimony is disappearing. A dynamic of patrimonialization is now following the processes of banalization. Socialist legacies are no longer degraded to the rank of objects standing on a plot having a value, but are considered as witnesses of a period of the history of architecture and of the country.

This reaction, particularly relevant in Poland, came first from the urban planners and the architects. But very soon, it reached the politic and more generally the public opinion thanks to the media. In Bulgaria, the debate did not focus on specific objects of the socialist architecture, but on some fragment of the territory with a great symbolic meaning, in which some buildings had been heavily transformed during the socialist period.

Such a debate focused in Poland on the most representative legacy of the Stalinist period of Polish history: the **Palace of Culture and Sciences in Warsaw**, which was a special gift from the Soviet Union to the People's Republic of Poland. The debate also concerns the most "socialist" town in Poland (except for new towns of the 1950s): Warsaw was almost entirely destroyed during the war; thus its landscape mainly reflects the different styles of socialist urban planning and architecture, with the exception of the Old Town which was reconstructed according to its historical feature. This is why the capital city of Poland was always considered as "non patrimonial", in comparison to such towns as Cracow for instance. And for the same, this can explain why the debate about socialist legacies began here. In 2001, the Polish Association of Architects (the SARP) asked for the creation of a commission in order to survey the destiny of Polish architecture of the period 1945-65. In 2003, the SARP passed on to the government a list of 77 objects that should deserve protection – among them was the Palace of Culture. An exhibition was organized in 2004 on that topic, and it widened the scope of the debate. As a result, the Palace of Culture was declared historical monument on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007. The political reaction was very unfavourable: indeed, meanwhile, the new President of Republic Lech Kaczyński was elected in 2005, on an electoral programme of «decommunization». The debate took on a rather acrimonious tone: 70 public personalities sent a letter to the President, saying they are against a formal protection of a monument which symbolized the alienation of the Polish nation. The public opinion is still very divided on this question. Architects now worry also - even more – about "ordinary" objects of the socialist period: some cinemas, administrative buildings, housing estates are on the SARP list to avoid what happened to the Moskwa cinema or to the Supersam supermarket.

In Sofia, the example of the **Rila Hotel** (built in the sixties) crystallizes social tensions that relate to a much larger territory and to issues far exceeding private interest. The project launched in June 2008 by an investor is the demolition of the hotel and the construction of a 22-floor business centre and the development of a multi-level underground car park. But as it is located in the city centre, the hotel is situated within the scope of the protected area - the architectural reservation of the "Serdica-Sofia", bound by the new Master Plan organization and planning of the capital in 2007 - and its destruction becomes more problematic. First, it implies a revision of a part of the plan (concerning the construction of the neighbourhood), a revision that has not occurred since

1969. On the other hand, it requires the approval of the National Institute of Monuments of Culture and City Council expert planning. The mayor of Sofia supports the destruction of the hotel as an expression of “unsightly socialist architecture”. On the other hand, the borough mayor Sredetz, the DBL (Democrats for Free Bulgaria) town councillors, and the Bulgarian Metropolitan are mobilized against the project. The religious monuments located in proximity, including the Sveti Nikolai Merclijski church, will be affected. They call such a project "vandalism" and accuse the Ministry of Regional Development and spatial planning and the Municipality of Sofia of giving their support to this company before deciding on the project.

## **b) Socialist legacies as tourism products: towards a "hyper-normalization"?**

When architecture is considered as having a value, it becomes an interest and a potential resource for a touristic valorisation. Only a virtual visit of the Wall is possible in Berlin. But in some cases, monuments have recently been offered as tourist attraction not because of their esthetical value, but because they represent a fragment of the national history. This was done recently in Romania: in Bucharest, in 2004, the Museum of Contemporary Art was set in the former Presidential Palace of Ceaușescu, and an exhibition showed a collection of paintings done for the Romanian dictator. In Latvia and Lithuania, former military Soviet bases are now open as a touristic experience, including enactment of interrogation, a night in a cell, etc.

The touristic and cultural offer includes also places of everyday life: in Nowa Huta (Cracow, Poland), a tourist agency proposes to visit a flat furnished and decorated in the Stalinist style of the 1950s. We can also quote the unexpected success of the German film *Good Bye Lenin*<sup>17</sup>. The interpretation of what German call the *Ostalgie* is not easy. On the one hand, we can see in this process of marketing an hyper-banalization of the socialist experience, and a cynical exploitation of the past, even its tragic dimension. The fact is that we should look differently at the touristic valorization of socialist legacy, depending on the original nature of these places. On the one hand, the conversion of a former military base into an entertainment park is possible when a society considers that only the present matters. On the other hand, we can consider that the celebration of everyday life places, like housing estates, allows the “post socialist” citizen to feel that his everyday life, his individual experience was in fact a part of the great History; thus, it gives a status to every member of the former “popular masses”<sup>18</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

The transformation of socialist legacies in Warsaw and Sofia reflects new needs, new practices, new representations, and thus new political attitudes toward socialist architecture. The comparison between Poland and Bulgaria shows the importance of the national context. There is now a legal framework defining a socialist “patrimony” in Poland, not in Bulgaria. Not simply because Poland has a strong culture of architecture and urbanism. Maybe also because the process of banalization went further during the 1990’s under economical pressures and rapid socio-economical transformations.

From demolition to patrimonialization of socialist legacies - the question to know how a society should deal with its collective representations of the past is not particular for post-socialist countries. But the radical and sudden shift that took place in 1990 made it more

---

<sup>17</sup> Wolfgang Becker, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Crowley, D. & Reid, S. E. (Eds) (2002), *Socialist spaces. Sites of everyday lifes in the Eastern bloc*, Oxford, 259 p.

sensible. Part of the present intellectual elite wishes to wipe out some part of the memory because it does not fit in today's engagements. But others consider that the society has to face its past through the material structures of the city. The two case studies presented in this paper allow to say that there was a turn. At the beginning of the 1990s, a French publication led by several historians dealt with East European societies and their memory. It was written at a time when these societies were perceived under the obsessions of memory: "The particular is strongly coming back against the universal and dissolvent abstraction of communism [...]. In this disrupted mental landscape, conservatories of memory, of patrimony, these numerous places of aggregation and of crystallization of identity codes and signs play a strategic role"<sup>19</sup>. This book was dealing both with abstract and material *memorial places*<sup>20</sup>. As far as the material ones are concerned, we should conclude by pointing to new trends today in Eastern Europe. First, several memories compete as far as socialist legacies are concerned, and the issue of their political legitimacy is not closed. Second, the national or local particularities have been since 1990 recovered by another universality, brought by the globalization and the market, which is the main cause of banalization of places.

Adam Michnik said once about Poland: "The political life in my country is getting boring, and I am very glad of it". Does this statement refer also to the urban landscape? In a sense, yes, since most relevant signs of the communist period, spatial improvements, have been disappearing for almost 20 years now, which is "normal". Post-socialist cities are more and more losing their common identity, and more and more looking like other "Western" cities. However, we can wonder how the next generations could have an opinion about the communist period in such countries like Poland and Bulgaria if a part of their material legacies in the city disappears, replaced by shopping malls built in an international style, and the other is transformed into entertainment parks. Some regret it, and see in the evolution of Polish urban planning "the sad lesson of the spatial liberalism"<sup>21</sup> (STANISZKIS, 2002). Two conclusions are quite certain. First, it is a hard political issue, and public opinion deals with it with passion when it has the opportunity to do so, as the example of the Palace of Culture in Warsaw shows. Second, it has thus to be treated in a democratic way, and not at the mere benefit of economical private interests.

---

<sup>19</sup> Brossat, A., Combe, S., Potel, J.-Y. & Szurek, J.-C. (1990), *A l'est, la mémoire retrouvée*, Paris. La Découverte, 570 p.

<sup>20</sup> Nora, P. (1984), *Les lieux de mémoire*, Paris. Gallimard.

<sup>21</sup> Staniszkis, M. (2002), Lekcja z ulicy Puławskiej [Les leçons de la rue Puławska] in Gzell, S. (Ed), *Krajobraz architektoniczny Warszawy końca XX wieku*, Varsovie, Akapit-DTP, pp. 173-208.