

Beijing, Berlin, and Bucharest: Legacies of socialist modernity at the end of history

Tridib Banerjee

School of Policy, Planning, and Development, University of Southern California, USA

Sociologist Ivan Szelyni has argued that it is possible to differentiate socialist cities from capitalist cities in three important ways: less diversity (relative scarcity of consumer services); less concentration in the use of land (absence of a land market), and less marginality (inhibition of individuality or creativity). What Szelyni has not addressed is the modernist obsession of socialist planning that gives the socialist cities still another distinctive character, very different from the capitalist order of cities. The culture of planning in the socialist era has been shaped by the central and authoritarian command of the Faustian state, and its obsession with axis, symmetry, monumental scale, ceremonial public spaces, segregated and hierarchy of land use, and the like.

This paper will expand on these ideas and explore further, how, at the end of history (Fukuyama, 1992), the socialist legacy of urban form is adapting to the new order of global economy. The paper will argue that it is precisely the modernity of the socialist city and its rational order, ironically, that has helped to accommodate the Faustian development triggered by the contemporary globalization. This will be demonstrated from case studies of the contemporary development of Beijing, Berlin, and Bucharest, three important cities associated with the socialist era.

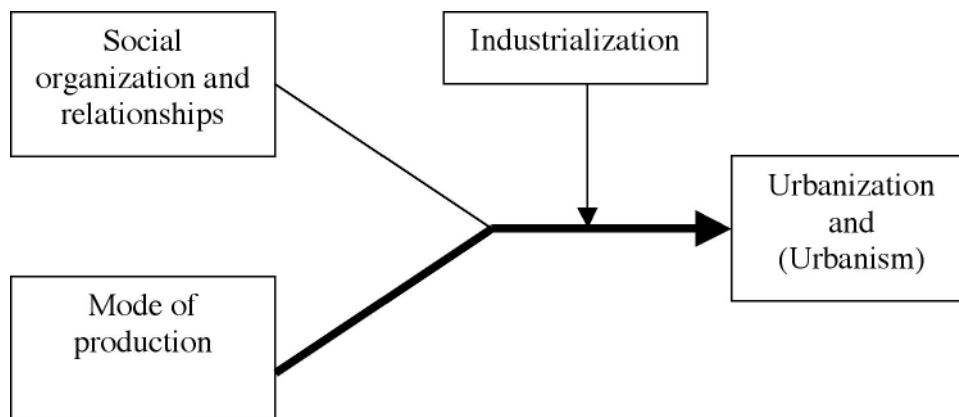
To some political theorists, the fall of the Berlin wall and the dissolution of Soviet Union symbolized the end of history - in the sense of the end of a dialectic of competing ideas about alternative political economies - as capitalism trumped socialism once and for all. The aim of this essay is not to challenge this position, although intellectual demurrals still may exist in the world of ideas.[1] The intent here, for the time being, is to accept it as a premise *fait accompli*, and to focus on the nature of the urban legacy shaped by the ideology and institutions of the socialist era. Indeed, while the era of socialism may have ended, or at least metamorphosed into a form of capitalism under a thin veneer of low-keyed and largely perfunctory communist ideology in some instances, the urban legacy of the fifty-plus years of socialist rule in various parts of the world no doubt will continue for a while. Yet, it is possible that the legacy of the socialist urban form may soon become an endangered species as exigencies of global capital make change and redevelopment immediate and inexorable in those cities. Thus before they become extinct we may want to examine how the urban forms and spaces of the socialist cities came about. At least this exercise may help us understand how political ideology and more broadly, political economy influence the outcome of urban design and planning.

This paper develops an argument that the socialist urban form is very much a product of modernity, just like its capitalist cousins. Although shaped by the socialist ideology and mode of production, socialist urban forms and spaces suffer the similar tragedy of modernity and development that many authors have previously noted (see for example Berman, 1982). The paper develops this argument in three parts. First, it reviews the model of socialist city presented by sociologist Szelyni (1993), and argues that the characteristics discussed by him may not be exhaustive, and additional criteria such as the effects of modernity must also be considered. Second, the paper presents some relevant perspectives on the critiques of modernity, and argues that the role of agency in the modernist transformation must be reckoned with to understand the legacy of socialist cities. Finally, in the third part the paper will present examples from three socialist cities - Beijing, Berlin, and Bucharest - to consummate the argument.

Essential Traits of Socialist Cities

How are socialist cities different from their capitalist counterpart in the structure, organization, and design of their built environment, and the urbanism of such spaces? Drawing primarily from the experience of East European countries Szelyni has argued that the socialist project has produced a unique urban outcome - both in terms of urbanism and urbanization - and that it is possible to differentiate socialist cities from capitalist cities in several important ways. He argues that this difference is discernible in the pattern and rates of urbanization - at the level of the systems of cities - and also in their urbanism. Thus one sees less of primacy or over-urbanization - rate of urban population growth surpassing the rate of urban job creation - but also a definite under-urbanization, a term he uses to indicate a lack of concomitant population growth consistent with the rate of urban job creation. As for urbanism, he uses this concept as sociologists like Ferdinand Tonnies, Georg Simmel, and later Louis Wirth previously had discussed, referring to the quality of social relations and ways of life in cities. In this tradition urbanism is defined "in terms of the density and diversity of human interaction (and institutions), anonymity, the breakdown of traditional community and its replacement by society, and the tendency of the urbanites to be marginal and creative." (Szelyni, p. 47) It is this aspect of Szelyni's discourse that I want to consider here, because it is relevant to our larger theme of images of development, and the role of urban design and planning in the process.

Szelyni builds his arguments by considering the inherent weakness of the ecological approach in social theory which would explain the urban outcome, such as urbanization (and urbanism, I would add), is fundamentally a consequence of industrialization, albeit modified by the social organization and relationships as intervening variables. In contrast, the historicist approach argues that social organization and relationships should be seen as the independent variables that influence the urban outcome, with the level of industrialization as an intervening variable. This would be consistent with the Webberian view. But he also he adds that the Marxian social theory, which emphasizes the mode of production as the most critical element in any social formation would agree also that industrialization is more of an intervening variable. He concludes that both the Marxian and Webberian views rely on the historical processes and antecedents as independent variables that influences the urban outcome, rather than the more conventional ecological, and (we might add, positivist) approach. The following diagram is a derivative of Szelyni's original schema demonstrating a synthesis of the Marxian and Webberian positions, which I believe, Szelyni implicitly advocates. In arguing how socialist cities are different from the capitalist cities, he draws essentially from the mode of production argument and focuses on the concept of "urbanism", which he finds absent from socialist cities. The heavy line in the diagram below suggests the principal path of Szelyni's arguments.



The absence of urbanism as the principal characteristic of the socialist urban outcome, has three distinguishing traits: absence of diversity; absence of concentration[2]; and absence of marginality. To put it another way, socialist cities are characterized by uniformity, diffusion, and conformity. Ironically, these are precisely the characteristics of the contemporary urban sprawl and suburbia that critics have decried as the bane of the market landscape of the advanced capitalist economies (see Kunstler for example). That centrally planned and the free market economies would produce an analogous urban outcome seems counterintuitive. However the similarity may indeed be more apparent than real, and we will revisit this point elsewhere. Meanwhile, in returning to Szelyni's points we should note that by absence of diversity he refers primarily to "the relative scarcity of urban services, shops, restaurants, ads, and street vendors" (p. 53) that thrive famously in market economies of advanced capitalist societies or even in poorer developing economies.[3] The absence of concentration, as he explains, is strictly a

function of non-existence of an urban land market. Since most of the land is under public or collective ownership, "(T)here is less pressure to economize with space in inner cities under socialism" (Szelyni, p. 54). He further argues that the absence of a land market liberates planners to pay more attention to matters of aesthetics and public realm and be generous in the allocation of inner city space for public purposes. This too is an interesting point and we will return to it later from a somewhat different perspective. Finally, let us consider Szelyni's point about marginality or lack thereof. Here he correctly points out that "negative" marginality in the form of visible poverty in capitalist cities like homelessness, panhandling, prostitution, slum housing, and even squatter settlements, are totally absent from socialist cities because of their egalitarian ideology and attendant welfare system. Parenthetically I note here that when Oscar Lewis (1966) defined the concept "culture of poverty," he was quite specific about noting that it was a product of capitalist cash economies and a characteristic not found in the socialist countries. While escaping negative marginalities, socialist cities nevertheless seem to be missing other forms of "positive" marginality or creative and innovative deviance in the form of alternative lifestyles, artists' colonies, ethnic neighborhoods, gay communities, and the like, that are common in capitalist democracies. In other words there is less tolerance for such deviant behavior in the socialist context and greater control for conformity in behavior and expressions, including freedom of speech. Robert Heilbroner points out that one of the positive aspects of capitalist economies is the incentive for creativity and innovation, including opposition to the capitalist system itself. This point of missing or less urbanism is probably one of the more critical arguments Szelyni considers in his essay.

Perhaps even a fourth trait can be added to Szelyni's three from the literature on dependent urbanization discussed by Castells (1976) who has argued that in addition to overurbanization and urban primacy, a dualistic urban form is also typical of many Third World cities located in a dependent economic relationship with industrialized nations of the West. This dualism of urban form, is in many instances a vestige of colonial urban development (King, 1976) and also a testimony to the technological and cultural dualism (see Geertz, 1963) and the enduring dualism of formal and informal economies (see Santos, 1979 for example). Like the phenomenon of marginality the cultural, economic, and technological dualisms are also absent in the socialist cities for the reasons discussed previously.

It should be clear that much of Szelyni's exposition of the characteristics of socialist cities is grounded in the positivist and empirical tradition of social sciences, although his own analysis is more conceptual and interpretive. But I would argue here that his mode of production as the most critical variable argument alone may not explain the urban form outcomes of specific socialist cities. Because it does not include the institutions, the leadership, and their individual or collective visions and imaginations that shaped the normative choices made about the organization of urban spaces and the design of the built environment. It would be appropriate to ask, for example, questions such as: What indeed were the images of socialist development that shaped the design and planning of the socialist cities like Beijing, Berlin, and Bucharest? The answer, I argue, lies in the socialist regimes' commitment to modernity. It goes without saying that the history of the communist or socialist project is strictly a product of modern times. The images of socialist development, it would follow then, were also inspired by the possibilities and promises of modernity. The entire socialist experiment of building cities and communities along with the planning of a centrally controlled economy was indeed steeped in the experience and worldview of modernity, and shaped by the same matrix of scientific and technological knowledge and imagination that has guided capitalist development elsewhere in the West.

Imperatives of Modernity

In exploring the modernist legacies of socialist cities we must first consider the concept of modernity itself, if only briefly, because there is a fairly vast literature on this subject that obviously cannot be reviewed in this limited space. One of the earlier efforts to define modernity was by identifying the characteristics of a modern man, in explicit contrast with those of a traditional man. Here the emphasis was on the output measures of the effects of modernity rather than the dynamics of the transformation that modernity represents (Inkeles and Smith, 1974), through economic and social development.

Recently Charles Taylor (2001) has argued that most critical writings on modernity - whether positive or negative - present it as an "acultural" process that "is conceived as a set of transformations which any and every culture can go through - and which all will probably be forced to undergo." (Taylor, p. 173) This position is reflected in the earlier notion of modernization as an "enactment of values" and also in the implicit link between modernization and development. Indeed this theory is in considerable currency today, in the wake of rapid globalization and the emergence of the network society (Castells, 1996). Taylor, however, is critical of this approach on several grounds. First, he argues that this view distorts and misrepresents the modernity of the West by misclassifying and narrowly construing its achievements. Second, he notes that this position typically assumes that modernity essentially involves the shedding of traditional beliefs and values. Third and finally, he suggests that what this value fails to grasp is that the difference between the modern society and our pre-modern forebears is not one of a difference in belief systems, but one of "background understanding against which our beliefs are formulated." (Taylor, p. 186) In other words, it may not necessarily represent a fundamental break from values and institutions rooted in a particular culture. Further, he argues, rather persuasively, that the transformation that modernity represents cannot be independent of culture, and indeed it is best to think of it not just as an universal model as epitomized by the West but more in terms of its variable possibilities — "alternative modernities" — imbedded in different cultural traditions and experiences.[4]

There is still another perspective - and deeply tormenting and critical one - on the experience of modernity that is represented by Marshall Berman's (1982) well-known book with a title derived from Marx's famous saying — "All that is solid melts into air" (Berman, 1982). In the introduction of this book Berman observes: "To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world - and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are." (p. 15) In fact his exposition seems to reflect the acultural theoretic notion of modernity whose "environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology..." Berman argues that the experience of modernity indeed may unite the mankind - a common refrain today in the advocacy of free trade and globalization of ideas and information - but he notes also that "...it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish." (p. 15) It should be apparent that Berman's position as manifest in the narratives discussed above makes it a target of Taylor's critique of the acultural theory of modernity. Indeed Berman's exposition is mainly drawn from the experience of the West as represented in the arts and literature, but it does not explore the alternative possibilities of modernity under different cultural circumstances.

While Taylor's argument for considering modernity in a culture-specific way makes much sense, it seems to beg the question of agency,[5] especially in the collective sense. On the one hand he critiques the acultural approach to rely too much on a model of modernity based on

"an often unreflective methodological individualism" (p. 193), of reason, and of such larger social transformations as increased mobility, industrialization, market processes, urbanization, and other institutional changes. On the other hand he sees the modern transformation is a transition to a new order, new possibilities, based on new information and understanding, and what he calls "social imaginary." The following passage captures a sense of this premise:

"But some of the major changes in embodied understanding and social imaginary alter the very repertory and introduce new possibilities that were not before on the horizon. I will sketch presently what this might involve in connection with the rise of the public sphere. Modernity involves the coming to be of new kinds of public space, which cannot be accounted for in terms of changes in explicit views, either of factual belief or normative principle. Rather, the transition involves to some extent the definition of new possible spaces hitherto outside the repertory of our forebears and beyond the limits of their social imaginary." (Taylor, 2001, p. 189)

What is not evident from this line of philosophical discourse is how this transformation is shaped by alternative ideologies, different formations of the modern state, alternative modes of production, power relationship, political leadership, and mechanisms for deliberate social and physical change that include urban design and planning.

In contrast, Berman's treatise on the experience of modernity draws from the works of Goethe, Marx, Baudelaire, Dostoevsky and other writers, and in the tradition of critical writings expounds on the conflicts and contradictions of modernity. Moreover his writing is not about a narrative of loss involving the traditional or the pre-modern as featured in Taylor's critique, but it is about constant destruction of historical legacies of the built environment, as well as spaces and communities created within the modern era. It is about the declining individual and social identity; it is about anomie, desolation, and abandonment; it is about helplessness in the face of inexorable change; it is about a state of flux and absence of stasis as the inevitable outcome of imperatives of modernity. It is not about a sense of loss in the transition from the traditional to the modern, as Taylor suggests, it is about the tragedy of development. The most telling symbol of this tragedy of development, and the experience of modernity more broadly, is Goethe's Faust, especially his third manifestation as the developer. To Berman he is the "archetypal modern hero":

"Thus Goethe sees the modernization of the material world as a sublime spiritual achievement; Goethe's Faust, in his activity as "the developer" who puts the world on its new path, is an archetypal modern hero. But the developer, as Goethe conceives him, is tragic as well as heroic. In order to understand the developer's tragedy, we must judge his vision of the world not only by what he sees - by the immense new horizons it opens up for mankind - but also by what it does not see: what human realities it refuses to look at, what potentialities it cannot bear to face. Faust envisions, and strives to create, a world where personal growth and social progress can be had without significant human costs. Ironically, his tragedy will stem precisely from his desire to eliminate tragedy from life." (Berman, p. 66)

It probably goes without saying that socialist ideology - egalitarian goals, communitarian life, collective ownership, socialist mode of production, a broad and universal welfare system - is essentially a product of modern times. It is a necessary component of an intellectual dialectic that has engaged social imagination for the good part of the last century. The socialist project is an antithesis to capitalism, to market economies, to democratic and property rights, and all such liberal institutions that emerged in modern times and are associated with the concept of modernity. So, the socialist modernity may be seen as one of the alternative modernities as

suggested by Charles Taylor. But it is not a derivative of a particular cultural heritage; it is a product of modern ideology.

Indeed all of the transformative elements of modernity - rational thinking, scientific methods, modern technology, and the like - that fueled and nurtured capitalist development, are also at the core of socialist transformation. It will be recalled that even in the Chinese socialist revolution which was a peasant based undertaking, modernity — “four modernizations,” (Murphey, 1980) for example - was intrinsic to the Maoist vision of Chinese development. It represented a deliberate break from tradition and all the baggage of the dynastic eras. Religion was systematically purged or discouraged. Practice of traditional belief systems like “Feng Shuey” was more or less eliminated, and so on.

As we will see in the following three cases of socialist urban spaces, their design, organization, and scale are modernist statements of a strong state authority, of a formal social order that is egalitarian at the individual level, but highly hierarchical and centralized in decisions involving spatial change. The planning and design of urban spaces are not constrained by land market, thanks to collective ownership of land. But specific design and planning decisions are not collective or shared; they are simply top-down. There is a strong sense of public realm and space, indeed often of monumental scale, but these are not spaces of the public sphere which mediates between the individual and the state. Indeed since civil society and public sphere are largely absent in the modernist experience of socialism, the purpose of monumental civic spaces are largely symbolic and ceremonial. The traditional functions of public spaces - conversation, social encounters, artistic performance or expressions, spontaneity of art, music or play are not allowed. The decorum of public behavior is rigidly prescribed and enforced, and these spaces remain sterile and soulless.

The impulses and the collective imagination that have created the urban spaces of socialist order are inherently Faustian, because most of these are created by destroying the historic fabric of the city where they are imposed. The long axis, the symmetrical layout, the exaggerated scale of boulevards and important buildings, large super-blocks, the baroque nodes of radiating axes, are all reminiscent of Baron Haussmann’s celebrated reconstruction of Paris at the end of the nineteenth century, a major feat of modernist planning and urban design. The repetitive linear blocks of housing that line these boulevards are in fact scaled down versions of Corbusier’s Voisin Plan for Paris, a modernist imagination for replacing the medieval city. These socialist urban formations are then classic examples of modernist development, forged by a Faustian state. The socialist public spaces of Beijing, Berlin, and Bucharest are cases in point.

Three Cases in Point

(a) BEIJING: Transformation of historic Beijing after the liberation of China in the late forties is probably one of the most celebrated cases of socialist modernization. It is rather startling to see actual photographs of the walled city of Beijing surrounded by farm land and open spaces with camel caravans approaching one of the many gates of the city. Today a few of the gates remain as silent reminders of the boundaries of the former walled city, and the streets continue to remember the gates by changing their designations as inside or outside a particular gate. By the time the Japanese occupation began in the forties, the city had already spilled over the walls presaging the contemporary urban sprawl that is Beijing today. As the gates became traffic bottlenecks, parts of the wall had started to come down during the Japanese occupation to ease traffic flow, but most of the historic wall still stood at the time of the Liberation. The wall finally came down at the “order from the very top” as one Chinese planner described it.[6] Using almost a Faustian rhetoric Chairman Mao, who always had penchant for colorful

metaphors, declared the wall a shackle that needed to be broken in order to develop and modernize Beijing. There were many objections from intellectuals but of course to no avail. As the wide walls were taken down, it created space for much needed housing - the old wall being replaced by a wall of high-rise residential towers - and construction of a subway loop following the outline of the wall. Now the outline of the wall is replaced by a highway loop, the first (although called second) of several concentric ring roads, and visible in satellite photos as the traces of the old Qing and Ming city walls.

The second major socialist reconstruction of Beijing involved creation of the famous Tian An Men square, by clearing out a historic quarter of the city that defined the formal approach to the Forbidden City lined with hutongs and spaces of royal administrative quarters. This approach was part of an unbroken axis that connected the central gate of the southern wall of the Ming city to Coal Hill immediately to the north of the Forbidden City, and defining the symmetry of the spaces and pavilions inside the Imperial Palace. The expansive open space that was created by clearing this approach and the old district is a monumental in scale. It covers an area of over forty hectares, a space large enough for a million people to assemble at a time. Clearly the purpose was to inspire the awe and admiration of the ordinary citizens toward the authority and power of the socialist state. Tian An Men Square is flanked by two massive and symmetrical structures - the People's Hall, and the Museum, designed in the Soviet style. The contrast between the red walls of the historic Forbidden City, and the pale stone facade of the two buildings is indeed quite striking. Opening up the central urban core was again a symbolic gesture of breaking away from historic city and creating a new modern space. What is significant about this space is that it is totally inconsistent with the tradition of Chinese public spaces and public life, which typically and historically have evolved in linear spaces of street markets, or more defined and contained space of gardens and courtyards. Enclosures of human scale rather than monumental open space were more typical in the tradition of Chinese urban cultures. Tien An Men square emulated public squares of the Western tradition, and the modernity of the West.

(b) BERLIN: In the case of Berlin it is somewhat difficult to separate the urban spaces and forms of socialist modernity from the larger narrative of destruction and reconstruction of Berlin that has engaged the city for the most part of the last century. In writing the history of this city Alexandra Richie (1998) found the legend of Faust the most compelling metaphor to capture the constant change and transformation of the city.

"It is in its portrayal of constant striving without counting the cost that the legend of Faust can serve as a metaphor for the history of Berlin. With Mephistopheles at his side Faust embarks on a terrible journey of discovery...Berlin, too, has undertaken an extraordinary journey, and its persistent quest for change has left it either - as now - cautiously searching for a role, or indulging in overweening arrogance and aggression. Its chameleon tendency to follow each new great ideology or leader, or to lurch maniacally from one grand political vision to another, has left a mesmerizing but often tragic legacy." (p. xviii)

Clearly the history of East Berlin is a sub-text of this larger narrative. But it is an important sub-text sharing the destiny and arrogance of constant destruction and rebuilding that is the essence of the experience of modernity. This history goes back to the Nazi era with Hitler's grand vision of Germania (but not implemented fortunately), followed by the massive destruction by the war. More destruction followed after the war by municipal and state agencies in the name of rebuilding and rationalizing street network, culminating in the construction of the Wall and more destruction to create the "death strip" (Stimmann, 2002). We need to focus on the central part of Berlin which fell mainly in the GDR control. The socialist redevelopment in the form of Alexanderplatz has created vast empty spaces in areas which once used to be a dense urban fabric. "The demolition was so radical" writes Stimmann (2002) "...All

that remains to remind us of the old town of Berlin is the fourteenth century church of St. Marien and the Rotes Rathaus.." (p. 19). Seemingly the competition between "market and Marx" led to several important projects of socialist modernity trying to keep pace with the glamorous projects of West Berlin. In addition to Alexanderplatz, the Marx-Engels Forum, the Palast der Republik (incidentally, by demolishing historic and war-damaged Stadtschloss) and Karl-Marx-Allee (Stalinallee) are examples of important projects in East Berlin. Every one of these projects shows the sterility and rigidity of the modernist architectural forms and empty urban spaces. (see Figure 1).

(c) BUCHAREST: Finally, we turn to Bucharest, and its Faustian redevelopment of the eighties. The scale of intervention authorized by Ceausescu, the autocratic dictator, is captured well in the following critical commentary.

"In the ninth decade of this century, a fracture was born and started growing wide right in the middle of Bucharest...the widening rupture cut deeply in the continuity of the city fabric, erasing houses, churches, hospitals, monuments from the ground, all witnesses of the city coming into being. The axial crack ended with a barren hill, free of both natural and artificial elements, on which preempts a gigantic and preposterous building ...on the hill, the giant looks unnatural and mediocre in style, and stands for a clear "token of the golden age"-absolutism, unbalance and obtuseness, demagoguery spirit and scorn of the ordinary man and the real truth." (Bucuresti 2000: International Urban Planning Competition, Simetria, p.26)

The extent of this intervention involves an area of roughly 485 ha, defined by an axis roughly 5 km long, and 800 to 1700 meters wide (Figures 2 and 3) and designed to exceed the length of Champs-Élysées by a few meters. Lined with housing towers and important public buildings, the axis is currently known as the Boulevardi Uniri (originally called the Boulevard of the Victory of Socialism), this ceremonial axis is anchored at western end by the huge Palace of Parliament (known as "House of the People" or Casa Poporului before 1989) of an exaggerated scale, and a major traffic rotary – Piata Alba Iulia — at the other end. At a point about a third of the length of the axis, where it crosses the channelized Splaiul river, there is a Piata Uniri – one of the largest public squares of Europe — embellished by important ceremonial spaces, fountains, water bodies and the like. This whole project — Centru Civic – was an attempt by Ceausescu to make Bucharest a major testimonial to the triumph of socialism and modernity it represented. The baroque style of urban design, the exaggerated scale, the symmetry, the formality, and the sterility of the ensemble is a major testimony to the argument I have presented previously. Others, like James C. Scott (1998), would see it as failure of contemporary city planning and urban design undertakings of the modern state. Parts of the axis are described as a "ghost town" in a recent guidebook of Bucharest. While identifying this ensemble as a tourist attraction, the commentary is a critical exhortation of everything that was wrong with this project of socialist modernity:

"To stroll through the western end of B-dul Uniri, from the enormous square that is Piata Unirii towards the equally enormous Casa Popotului, is to find oneself in no man's land.....While the part of the boulevard east of Piata Unirii hardly flourishes, there are at least enough banks, insurance companies and passing traffic to make the place look lived in. The western end, however, is a surreal, film set-like peek into a never world of megalomania.....while the apartments above were once most sought after, now many remain empty, as proprietors who refuse to acknowledge market forces continue to demand exorbitant rents that not even the wealthy Arabs of yore (sic) will now pay. The absence of road traffic, and pedestrians, merely adds to the surrealism." (Bucharest In Your Pocket, nd, p. 55)

What the commentary does not note however is how the recent adornments of large multinational corporate signs and billboards of the global consumer economy have begun to significantly alter the original façades of Ceausescu's Centru Civic project.

Conclusion

To conclude, several points should be noted. First, socialist planning and reconstruction of cities represent an important epoch in the on-going project of defining urban space and form in particular images of development. In this case the vision was one of egalitarianism and modernity. No doubt the specific urban outcomes of the socialist urban projects have been shaped by their particular inheritance of culture and economy, but there are some leitmotifs of socialist planning and design that are common to all. Second, it is this point that interested Szelyni, who has argued that the legacy of the socialist cities may be best interpreted through the mode of production filter, and the freedom of planning unencumbered by the usual constraints of private property ownership and rights. Third, while I accept the essential premise offered by Szelyni, I argue that those alone may not fully explain the appearance and design of socialist cities. Indeed to limit it to the mode of production filter denies the preeminence of the modernist visions that inspired and impelled the design of urban form and space. Fourth, I have argued that one of the important instincts of this modernist urban design was to deny the traditional and indigenous form, which was associated with lack of progress, decadence, and exploitation. Just as Marshall Berman has argued in his critique of modernity by using Goethe's Faust as the hero of development, socialist urban planning and design had very little regard for the cultural heritage and traditions of these cities. We have seen this in the collective saga of urban development in Beijing, Berlin, and Bucharest – the destruction of the traditional approach to the Forbidden City in Beijing, the demolition of Stadtschloss and the historic core of Berlin, and the annihilation of the medieval central district of Bucharest. In affirming the triumph of socialism, historic urban fabric was destroyed to create monumental spaces of public buildings and squares. Fifth, and interestingly, the inspiration for these monumental spaces – the grand axis, the symmetry, the superhuman scale – presumably created to instill a sense of pride and accomplishment among the citizens of socialist republics all came from the very bourgeoisie adaptation of the baroque and neo-classical order. Thus the scale and symmetry of Tiananmen Square, the grand axis of Stalinallee and the placelessness of Alexanderplatz, and the pretentious monumentality of Casa Poporului and Bulevardul Unirii all reflected the same civic design ideals popular at the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries: baroque order of Hausmann's Paris, Daniel Burnham's plan for Chicago, and the various expositions that were staged at various places to celebrate the industrial accomplishments of that time. Sixth, and finally, there is also an element of agency of leadership that is not included in Szelyni's characterization of socialist cities. Yet this has been an important feature of the modern socialist state as discussed by Scott in his case study of Tanzania's experiment initiated by Julius Nyerere. These projects almost always were driven by a Faustian megalomania, that of Mao in Beijing, the GDR planners in Berlin, and of course most famously that of Ceausescu in Bucharest.

Today, at the end of history, the capitalist reconstruction effort fueled by the spirit of neo-liberalism and market forces of the global economic order seemingly has begun to initiate a new transformation – either as market based overlays and new uses of existing urban spaces, or alternatively smaller grain of change brought about by private property ownership and rights. In retrospect, however, we should be asking whether these socialist urban outcomes may be seen merely as examples of alternative modernities as Charles Taylor (2001) argues, or as examples of Faustian impulses of development that Berman (1982) so eloquently describes as the essence of modernity? These are the questions we need to address at the end of history as long as we continue to plan and design our cities in the images of development shaped by the imperatives of the new modernity of globalization.

References

- BERMAN, M. 1982 All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience Of Modernity. New York: Simon and Schuster
- CASTELLS, M. 1976 The Urban Question; A Marxist Approach. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- CASTELLS, M. 1996 The Rise Of The Network Society. MA: Blackwell.
- FUKUYAMA, F. 1989 The End of history? The National Interest. Summer, pp.18.
- GEERTZ, C. 1963 Peddlers And Princes: Social Change And Economic Modernization In Two Indonesian Towns. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- HEILBRONNER, R. 1985 The Nature And Logic Of Capitalism. NY: W. W. Norton.
- INKELES, A. and SMITH, D. 1974 On Becoming Modern: Individual Changes In Six Developing Countries. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- KING, A. 1976 Colonial Urban Development. London: Routledge.
- KUNSTLER, J. 1993 The Geography Of Nowhere: The Rise And Decline Of America's Man-Made Landscape. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- LEWIS, O. 1966 "The Culture of Poverty" Scientific American.215(4):19-25.
- MURPHEY, R. 1980 The Fading Of The Maoist Vision: City and Country in China's Development. New York: Methuen
- RICHE, A. 1998 Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin. New York: Carroll & Graf.
- SANTOS, M. 1979 The Shared Space: Two Circuits Of The Urban Economy In Underdeveloped Countries. New York: Methuen.
- STIMMANN, H. 2002 The City In Black: The Physiognomy Of Central Berlin In Figure-Ground Plans And Parcel Plans. Berlin: Nicolai.
- STIMMANN, H. 2001 "City models - models for a city?" Berlin - Stadmodelle. City of Berlin.
- SZELENYI, I. 1993 East European cities: How different are they? In Greg Guldin and Aidan Southall (Eds) Urban Anthropology in China. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- TAYLOR, C. 2001 "Two theories of modernity" in Dilip P. Gaonkar (Ed) Alternative Modernities. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. pp. 172-196.

End Notes

- 1 Francis Fukuyama (1989; 1992) is an articulate protagonist of this view. See for example response(pp. 19 to xx) to Fukuyama in the Summer 1989 issue of *The National Interest* following Fukuyama's article.
- 2 Szelyni does not actually use the term "concentration," it is my characterization of the phenomenon he describes as "less economizing with space and consequently lower inner-city urban density, including the density of social interaction in inner urban public places." (Szelyni, p.53).
- 3 We note however that while there may not be any souks and bazaars in European socialist cities, which are the source of Szelyni's analysis, thriving street markets were quite commonplace in cities of China under its earlier socialist days.
- 4 Indeed this position can be seen as a reconciliation between the advocates of modernity, and its detractors, and may help us to accept the fact that there might be an "Indian modernity", a Chinese "modernity" and even an Islamic modernity".
- 5 As in the case of Szelyni's argument noted previously.
- 6 Personal communication in a 1980 meeting with the Beijing planning department.
- 7 Berman, Marshall 1982 *All that is solid melts into air: The experience of modernity*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- 8 Fukuyama, Francis 1989 *The End of history?* *The National Interest*. Summer, pp.18.