

From public to private: spatial structure and built forms in post-socialist Sofia

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For forty-five years, between 1944 and 1989, the socialist state was the chief producer of urban space and built forms in Sofia, the national capital of Bulgaria. Since the collapse of socialism fourteen years ago, it is the private sector that has assumed this role. This historic shift has brought radical transformations to the urban fabric of Sofia, as it has in other post-socialist cities.

This paper examines these characteristics of post-socialist urban spaces and built forms that clearly distinguish them from their socialist predecessors. Using the well-known model of the socialist city as a series of consecutive zones of development, suggested by French and Hamilton (1979), the paper first summarizes the key processes of change that have occurred in the separate zones of the city, or namely: the intense re-urbanization of select central areas, the crisis of the socialist housing estates, and the emergence of a new, low-density development ring on the urban fringe that has obliterated the boundary between the urban and the rural (in other words, post-socialist sprawl). Second, the paper identifies several citywide processes of post-socialist urban transformation: decrease of spatial scale, decrease of building scale, privatization of space, diversification of land uses and individualization of aesthetic styles. Lastly, the paper brings forward some key challenges facing the urban planning profession in post-socialist Sofia: how to ensure architectural contextualism in the historic city center; how to preserve public green spaces in the urban neighborhoods, and how to deal with post-socialist urban sprawl. It concludes that all three challenges are yet to find a successful planning response.

Introduction

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Sofia—a socialist city

French and Hamilton described the socialist city as a series of distinctive zones:

“When traveling out from the city center one can observe the following zones: (1) the historic medieval or renaissance core; (2) inner commercial, housing, and industrial areas from the capitalist period; (3) a zone of socialist transition or renewal, where modern construction is partially and progressively replacing inherited urban or relict-village features; (4) socialist housing of the 1950s; (5) integrated socialist neighborhoods and residential districts of the 1960s and 1970s; (6) open or planted ‘isolation belts;’ (7) industrial or related zones (8) open countryside, forest, or hills, including tourist complexes.” (French and Hamilton 1979: 227).

Despite some debates as to whether the socialist (as compared to the capitalist) city represented a truly different model of urbanization (see Enyedi 1996, Szelenyi 1996), most researches agree that the socialist city exhibited the distinctive zones, described by French and Hamilton, as well as several specific visual features. Unlike many Western cities, socialist downtowns, which hosted the key civic enterprises, showed no signs of abandonment, and their historic architecture remained well preserved. The surrounding pre-war urban neighborhoods—the former house of the bourgeoisie—were, however, in need of partial reconstruction, although most had retained their charming urban character and tree-lined streets. The urban zones built under socialist auspices, which came to house the majority of the urban population, embodied a distinctive transition in urban planning paradigms. The areas built in the 40s and 50s represented an extension of the pre-war urban patterns, while the post-1960s estates followed the rules of modernism

Overall, as compared to their capitalist counterparts, socialist cities remained more compact. That is, while capitalist cities ended up surrounded by rings of post-war suburbs, socialist cities underwent controlled suburbanization in the form of the state-built housing estates. In addition, socialist cities had more generous public spaces, as the state owned the majority of urban land and could build without any constraints of land prices. They were also less segregated by social status, and freer from crime. Yet, those seeming advantages were offset by one visual feature that seemed to dominate socialist cities—blandness and lack of diversity to

the point of boredom (Bodnar 2001, Tammaru 2001, Smith 1996, Szelenyi 1996, Haussermann 1996, French and Hamilton 1979).

Pre-1990 Sofia clearly exhibited the spatial structure and the key features of the socialist city (Staddon and Mollov 2000). Traveling out from the center one could observe the succession of zones described by French and Hamilton (1979). The city center—home of numerous ancient ruins—remained in the same location for 2000 years. The downtown area, built mostly between the late nineteenth and the mid-twentieth century, surrounded the center and hosted the main civic buildings. While it lacked the diversity of functions, styles and colors of Western capitals, its architectural monuments stood tall and the integrity of its streetscape remained preserved. The pre-war urban neighborhoods, such as Oborishte, were also blander and in some cases in need of re-construction, but well provided with green space. The post-war neighborhoods, such as Iztok, were comprised of human-scale, medium-height buildings along a traditional street system. The giant post-1960 socialist housing estates, such as Mladost, were built for a total of 700,000 residents over former farmland. While housing a diverse population and allowing access to a variety of services, they were cheaply constructed, deadly monotonous and epitomized the most austere version of modernist design (Lizon 1996, Klassanov 1992). Lastly, the estates were surrounded by a zone of farms and fields, and in turn succeeded by villages and “villa zones”, such as Dragalevtzi, which exhibited the strange co-existence of modest rural homes, and the villas of the communist elite.

From socialist to post-socialist Sofia: key transformations

This socialist city is now only the skeleton of its former self; fourteen years of post-socialism have given it an entirely different, more vivid persona. Downtown and select urban areas have thrived, while the socialist estates are in a crisis (Lizon 1996). As in other post-socialist cities (Bodnar 2001, Sykora 1999, Weclawowicz 1998, Sarmany-Parsons 1998), growing social segregation has brought growing spatial segregation, while in aesthetic styles and land uses state-sponsored monotony has been replaced by private-led diversity. Simultaneously, in a process reminiscent of the century-old retreat from the city of the Western bourgeoisie (Fishman 1987), a distinctive new spatial ring has risen, which houses Sofia’s newly rich (Hirt 2003, Staddon and Mollov 2000 on Sofia; Bodnar 2001, Peters 2001, Shove and Anderson 1997, Haussermann 1996 on other cities).

This paper analyzes some key changes in the spatial structure of post-socialist Sofia. First of all, it discusses changes that are specific to the distinctive city zones, namely: (a) re-urbanization of select central areas; (b) crisis of the socialist estates; and (c) rise of a post-socialist zone on the urban fringe. Second, it identifies several citywide trends: (a) decrease of spatial scale; (b) decrease of building scale; (c) privatization of space; (d) diversification of land uses; and (e) pluralization of architectural styles. Lastly, it points to some challenges facing the urban planning profession in Sofia.

Zone-specific developments

Central urban areas

Sofia’s downtown is comprised of two main parts. The turn-of-the-century part includes the most important civic buildings and is built mostly in Art Nouveau styles, although eclecticism, neo-baroque and national romanticism enjoyed considerable popularity as well (Koeva 2000). The 1950s part (the “Largo”) includes a massive complex of grand civic buildings in Stalinist neo-

classicism (Boyadjiev 2000). The pre-war neighborhoods (e.g., Oborishte and Lozenetz) around downtown are built along the principles of early twentieth century urbanism: geometrically oriented, tree-lined streets, small parks, and human-scale buildings, mostly in Art Nouveau and early modernist styles (Staddon and Mollov 2000). Through socialism, downtown remained well preserved, as it acted as the “showcase” of the socialist state. After a brief fling with Corbusian ideas for replacing the historic fabric with modernist towers (which never materialized), the socialist planners adopted historic preservation principles, and after 1970, 700 historic buildings were placed under legal protection (Atanassov 2002, Labov 2000, 1979). Yet, the pre-war areas around downtown suffered from perpetual disinvestments, as the socialist policy was to channel population in “modern” estates away from the center. This dual policy—preservation of the center and neglect of the areas around it—was also typical of other socialist capitals (e.g., Haussermann 1996).

Currently, Sofia’s downtown and select urban neighborhoods around it are undergoing intense re-urbanization. This process is largely the consequence of the “unfreezing” of the land and real estate market, and the policy of restitution of pre-war property. Since real estate is by far more desirable and highly priced in the center than in the periphery (in the center, real estate prices are around \$300-to-450 per sq m, as compared to 150-to-250 in the socialist estates; *Sofia Properties* 2002), lower-and-middle class residents are forced to sell or lease their flats to private businesses. Thus, downtown has recently witnessed the massive conversion of residential spaces to office and commercial use, and the exodus of around 50,000 residents (Nikiforov 2001).

Re-development has also been intense in certain “prestigious” neighborhoods, such as Lozenetz (whose housing stock has increased by twenty-three over a period of eight years, despite the absence of any large chunks of vacant land for refill; *Statistical Compilation—Sofia* 1993:160, *Sofia in Figures* 2001: 78). As in other post-socialist cities, such areas have become the center of post-socialist gentrification (e.g., Bodnar 2001 on Budapest). Restituted public green spaces (including small urban parks and children’s playgrounds), as well as derelict pre-war single-family houses, are being *en masse* replaced by fancy (and fenced) medium-height residential buildings—a process which has resulted in a substantial increase in development densities. Simultaneously, as in the downtown areas, residential first floors along the main streets are commonly converted to commercial use. Coupled with the eclectic architecture of the new buildings, this conversion has radically transformed what was once a relatively uniform and dull socialist streetscape into a kaleidoscopic arrangement of shapes, colors and signs.

Socialist housing estates

The housing estates are the signature of the socialist state, its most distinctive contribution to the urban fabric (Bodnar 2001). Sofia has many such giant housing estates (e.g., Mladost, Liulin, Nadejda and Studentski Grad), which were built between 1963 and 1989, and now house two-thirds of the city population (Genova 2000).

The estates were built on the “micro-region” principle (a term imported from Soviet planning; see Smith 1996) as large self-sufficient neighborhood units. Each was designed around a civic center, accessible via public transit. The location and land use balance of these centers were “calculated” for the needs of the “average human unit” (Klassanov 1992). In reality, however, the socialist planners often either grossly underestimated the need for services, or tried to cut costs by postponing, or never building, the non-residential spaces (which is why the estates are now ridiculed as the “non-complex complexes”; Gulubov 1990). Mladost, for

instance, the home of one hundred thousand residents, never had either a cinema or a swimming pool.

In urban design terms, the estates represented a clear rejection of the traditional urban pattern of pre-1960 Sofia and a triumph of modernist urbanism, whose principles appealed to the socialist ideologues as they embodied the logic of machine-like efficiency (Smith 1996, Lizon 1996). Thus, instead of human-scale buildings located along the periphery of the city block, the estates comprised of endless series of large, repetitive, panel-fabricated residential buildings—true “machines for living”—that were located far from the street, amid vast common green areas aimed for public enjoyment.

The socialist estates are now in a severe crisis (also Lizon 1996). A recent report grouped their staggering problems as follows: urban planning (long distance from the city center, poor access to jobs and services); estate layout (lack of defensible, human-scale spaces); structural (the most serious issue; a myriad of problems from leaking roofs to insecure construction joints are now a threat to the very physical integrity of the buildings); energy loss; social problems (aging population, departure of “white” middle class residents); lack of funding for improvement and unclear legal status (University of Architecture, Sofia, and University of Lincolnshire and Humberside, England 2001).

Despite the visible signs of deterioration, there are some signs of selective renewal. Mladost, for example, has recently added a large business park and 2,000 living units (*Sofia in Figures* 2001; *Statistical Compilation: Sofia* 1993), mostly in the form of human-scale and mixed-use buildings. The most notable metamorphosis, however, does come in the form of massive conversion of tiny ground floor apartments, entry halls and garages to colorful coffee shops and mini-marts (Thornley 1993). At the same time, the green spaces between the buildings that are still publicly owned remain in disarray, while those that have been restituted are quickly vanishing under new gas stations.

Post-socialist suburbia

The development of the socialist estates may be regarded as socialism’s own version of the decentralization phenomenon that swept post-war Western landscapes (Szelenyi 1996). However, the socialist experience was markedly different: while the building of the estates did amount to a massive conquest of farmland (Sofia expanded from 4,000 in 1945 to 19,000 ha in 1989), socialist cities still remained more compact (Haussermann 1996), and retained a clearly defined urban edge (Tamaru 2001).

True, Western-type sprawl—low-density growth around the historic city, which blurs the boundary between urban and rural—is a post-socialist phenomenon in Eastern Europe. This process of sprawl or slow “colonization of land behind the latest range of tower blocks” (Andrusz 1996:69) is now in full swing around most historic cities in the region (Bodnar 2001, Peters 2001, Shove and Anderson 1997, Haussermann 1996).

In Sofia, the most intense sprawl is occurring on the south side of the city, in the region of Vitosha, named after the neighboring mountain. Particularly affected have been the areas of Boyana, Kniajevo, Dragalevtzi and Simeonovo. Those former villages had remained mostly rural through socialism, although some were declared as “villa zones” (areas for second homes), and many communist leaders had indeed built their villas there.

In post-socialist times, the number of housing units in the Vitosha region has increased by fifty percent. It now comprises fifteen percent of all new housing in the city (*Sofia in Figures* 2001: 78; *Statistical Compilation, Sofia* 1993: 160). Entire new neighborhoods—some made of individually built single-family houses, some united into large fenced groups, some attached and some detached—have spread among the former villas at an amazing speed, along with fancy restaurants, hotels and fitness centers. A solid band of new red roofs may be now seen between the ring of socialist complexes and the mountain. Unlike the socialist “villas,” these

new homes are full-time residences; in fact, many of the former villas have by now been converted to residences as well.

This phenomenon has been enabled by several factors, from economic (i.e., the sudden birth of a wealthy class) to technological (i.e., the immense growth of car ownership; there are now 406.4 cars per 1,000 people in Sofia, as compared to only 207.5 in Stockholm, e.g.; *Sofia in Figures* 2001) and legal (most new development is occurring on restituted land). But it is also a sign of a cultural transition. The private home—the most prevalent residential form in post-socialist suburbia—is the symbolic antidote of the forced collectivism of the socialist estates. It has become for many the “quintessential representative symbol” (Andrusz 1996: 69) of their new place in a capitalist society.

Citywide trends

Decrease of spatial scale

As Enyedi argues, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the socialist city was “less economizing with space” (1996: 301). In other words, as urban land was overwhelmingly owned by the socialist state, socialist planners were not constrained by land prices and were able to build massive projects, some with highly ceremonial purposes, with much greater ease. In central Sofia, the most stellar example of such grand construction was the 1950’s “Largo”—the large complex of civic buildings in Stalin-blessed neo-classicism. Although the area had experienced some war damage, the project was only possible after the nationalization of many pre-war properties and their subsequent clearance. A late, 1980s example of such development grandeur was the giant People’s Palace of Culture and its surrounding park. The housing estates themselves are yet another case of such mammoth development scale. The state-owned homebuilding factories were able to produce whole new neighborhoods over brief periods of time (10-15 thousand units were built per year; Genova 2000). Public green space between the buildings was oversized, not only because the socialist planners believed in Corbusier’s “towers-in-the-park” principles but also because the distances between the buildings were calculated to allow the free movement of the large cranes lifting the panels (Lizon 1996).

Post-socialist developments are of a radically smaller scale. Neither do post-socialist authorities have unconstrained control over land, nor do they have the resources of their socialist predecessors to build projects of such magnitude. Post-socialist urban projects are more modest, intimate and decorative—fountains, statues, brick-pavements, gardens (e.g., recent improvements of Slaveikov’s Square, or the garden that replaced the demolished mausoleum of the late communist leader G. Dimitrov).

In terms of housing construction, public authorities have completely relinquished the initiative to private firms (in fact, even the panel buildings started before 1989 were abandoned, resulting in dozens of skeletons of half-finished buildings; Stoev 2002). In contrast to the mass-produced and instantly built estates of socialism, new housing comes mostly as individual buildings, whether single or multi-family. There have been very few groups of residential buildings (barely any large enough to be labeled as “subdivisions”).

The most notable exception—the largest single group of residential buildings built in Sofia over the last ten years—is the “Bokar” complex in the southern part of the city, near Vitosha. Winner of the 1995 National Review of Architecture award (Gugov 2001), this development includes detached and attached single-family houses, and medium-height condominium buildings, whose first floors are used for office and commercial spaces. Even this, largest residential group in the city, with its total of 6.7 acres of land and 150 residential units altogether, is a mere dwarf in comparison to any of the socialist estates whose skylines one may

see in the background. Furthermore, spaces in Bokar—organized in small private yards, around an intimate common space with seating and a fountain—bears no resemblance to the vast green fields that separate the socialist towers.

Decrease of buildings' scale

Parallel to the post-socialist decrease of spatial scale, there has been a notable decrease in buildings' scale. Post-socialist buildings are more similar in scale to those of pre-war Sofia than to those of socialism. This is particularly true for residential buildings.

Nowhere today is this shift of scale more visible than in the socialist estates. Consider, for example, the new residential buildings constructed by the firm "Delar" near a busy intersection of "Alexander Malinov" Boulevard, in Mladost. Placed directly across the street from a large group of gloomy and dilapidated socialist apartment buildings, the new buildings are no more than a third of the size of their socialist neighbors: four-to-six as compared to twelve stories; with a single as opposed to multiple common ground floor entrances; and each housing a dozen rather than several dozens of families. As a matter of fact, while ninety percent of the socialist housing construction in Mladost exceeded seven stories, almost all residential buildings constructed in the 1990s are between four and six. (*Residences by number of floors in the building in which they are situated* 1993, 2001).

Privatization of space

In socialism, the majority of urban land was publicly owned. The privatization and restitution to pre-war owners of this land have been one of the most important policies of the post-socialist state. The result has been the massive conversion of public spaces to private use. Public green spaces have been the ones most directly affected because only "undeveloped" land may be restituted. This includes land in some of the large urban parks, the fields between the socialist apartment blocks, small urban gardens and even playgrounds.

While the new developments may represent a more humane environment than the oversized and underused fields of the socialist estates, in urban areas such as Lozenetz, they have brought the massive disappearance of greenery. Changes have been radical on the urban edge as well, particularly near Vitosha. There, what was in socialist times villas, green fields and farms, is now a solid band of red roofs. And some of Sofia's finest parks have been partially converted to construction grounds that now include new residential buildings, theme parks and even the complex of the new American embassy.

The process of space privatization goes beyond the physical conversion of public spaces to private use. New built forms and spaces are not only private in the sense of legal ownership; they are private by design. They manifest the primacy of the private domain as explicitly as socialist spaces manifested the primacy of the public. Once again, this is best understood by exhibiting the contrast between socialist and post-socialist housing. As other modernist projects (see Holston 1989), the socialist estates were designed as isolated towers among avowedly public, accessible to all, space—the built form embodiment of socialism's dedication to a communitarian social order. In contrast, post-socialist spaces are not only smaller and more intimate; they are *explicitly* private. Inaccessibility is secured in multiple ways: security systems, armed guards, or paid entrance. But most notably in terms of built form it is secured through the recent resurrection of a particular South European building tradition—the foot-wide and six-foot-tall fence. A separate article may be written on the remarkable architecture of the post-

socialist fence (see Dandolova 2002). While in socialist times private homes were also often fenced, their fences were almost always transparent. The post-socialist fence, however, is an architectural structure itself, a solid wall of brick or stone hiding the house behind, visually and physically impermeable, sometimes with its own decorative roof. This fence, albeit illegal under the building code (which still requires part of it to be transparent), surrounds now almost all new homes, often whole new neighborhoods and even new apartment buildings right among their freestanding socialist predecessors.

Diversification of land use

One of the most striking characteristics of the socialist as compared to the capitalist city was the lack of diversity: the “relative scarcity of urban services” such as shops and restaurants, (Szelenyi 1996: 300), a quality which deprived the socialist city of vibrancy, and endowed it with a sense of “uniformity and boredom” (Bodnar 2001: 29).

The lack of urban services was particularly apparent in the socialist estates. There, most of the buildings were designed as residential-only, while the non-residential spaces were to be located in a separate buildings’ group in a neighborhood center, in transit proximity to the residences. This idea was pursued not only because modernist planning theory endorsed land use separation, but also because efficiency demanded it: it was cheaper to repeat the same standard residential unit from the top to the bottom of a panel building, rather than build service spaces of a different layout underneath the flats. Yet, the common outcome was that residential buildings were built first, while the construction of service spaces was delayed or never implemented (Dandolova 2001).

The recent proliferation of commercial services throughout the city has been one of the most transformative processes that came as a result of the freeing of private initiative after 1990. The number of commercial spaces between 1989 and 1997 has, in fact, tripled (Genov, Slavejkov and Ganev 2000: 95). Paired with the phenomenal growth of private offices, this has led to the total transformation of the urban landscape in the direction of land use diversification and diversification of physical forms, colors and signs—a process that has affected both new and existing buildings. The first-floor rows of once rather monotonous central streets, such as Vitosha, are now almost completely taken by upscale shops, restaurants serving ethnic food that was until recently completely unknown, Vienna cafes, and tourist bureaus advertising exotic destinations, all competing for the client’s attention with their bright windows and flashy signs. The ground-floor apartments, garages and entry halls of half-dilapidated socialist apartment buildings have been similarly transformed into tiny pharmacies, mini-markets and dentist offices, giving rise to the half-joking term “garage architecture” (Dandolova 2002, 2001). New buildings, whether in the central areas, the urban neighborhoods or the socialist estates, are now almost without exception built with their first-floor reserved for office and retail spaces, as is the case of the “Bokar” and “Delar” developments described above.

Pluralization of style

Lastly, post-socialist built forms are forms of a radically different architectural aesthetics. Little can be said in defense of state-sponsored socialist architecture. After a brief fling with Stalinist neo-classicism in the 1950s, socialist ideologues officially embraced the principles of modernism (Boyadjiev 1994). In their most austere and inhumane form, these principles

crystallized in the repetitive, uniform, standardized buildings of the socialist housing estates (Staddon and Mollov 2000, Klassanov 1992).

If socialist aesthetics was about forced collectivism and bland uniformity, then post-socialist aesthetics is about exactly the opposite: stylistic pluralism, triumphant individualism, wild juxtapositions of forms and colors (Gugov 2001, Dandelova 2002, 2001). The urge to demonstrate an aesthetic break with the socialist past and rebel against its policy of standardization has been so strong, in fact, that it has been compared to a similar obsession with historic discontinuity that penetrated Bulgarian culture right after liberation from Ottoman domination 125 years ago, in the 1880s (Boyadjiev 2000).

Current styles vary from neo-classic to Bulgarian Renaissance revival, from archetypical postmodern to neo-rationalist; some are too bizarre to fit in any style and are ridden with aesthetic imports. In the historic downtown areas, glamorous blue glass hi-tech office buildings compete with the mild yellows and neutrals of early twentieth century Art Nouveau (as is the case of a demolished museum and its replacement with a shiny office structure, across from the Parliament). In the new suburban areas, resurrected nineteenth-century tile-roofed Bulgarian houses neighbor marble simulations of Italian palazzos, and variations of flat-roofed whitewashed stucco Mediterranean villas strangely co-exist with bright vinyl-covered shingle-roofed houses of the American suburban type.

Post-socialist architecture has thus moved, in the words of one critic, from a state of collectivistic "super-order" to a state of private-driven "super-chaos" (Dandelova 2002: 114). The urge to rebel against standardization and demonstrate the uniqueness of each building (and by extension the uniqueness and prosperity of its owners) is so strong that new buildings tend to "go to war" with the existing street, and with each other (Alexieva 2001). Thus, they become captives of a "central paradox": on one side, full embrace of postmodern architectural pluralism, and on the other complete lack of any postmodern sensitivity to the surrounding urban context (Alexieva 2001). While this post-socialist diversity may be an improvement over socialist homogeneity, streetscapes in the central urban areas, built in early twentieth century Art Nouveau styles, have been adversely affected as the new buildings have indeed gone to war with their neighbors.

Conclusion

The transformations of spatial structure and built forms in post-socialist Sofia have been more than dramatic. Post-socialist structure is characterized by intense re-urbanization of select central areas, crisis of the socialist housing estates, and the emergence of a new, low-density development ring on the urban fringe. Simultaneously, post-socialist forms and spaces tend to be smaller, more humane in scale, explicitly private, and more diverse both in land use composition and aesthetic styles. These transformations are not unique to Sofia; similar transformations have been described in the context of other post-socialist cities as well (e.g., Bodnar 2001, Peters 2001, Garb 2000, Sarmany-Parsons 1998, Haussermann 1996, Andrusz 1996 on Central Europe).

While these post-socialist developments may bring about a more humane and vibrant urban environment than their post-socialist predecessors, they also come with a set of distinctive problems that are yet to find an adequate planning response. In Sofia, three such problems are particularly acute. First of all, public green spaces in the city are under the threat of slow extinction. Second, the once distinctive urban boundary of the city has by now all but disappeared under intensive Western-type sprawl development. And third, the rise of architectural pluralism, with all its positive implications for urban vibrancy, has strongly

undermined the aesthetic integrity of the historic urban areas.

Post-socialist local authorities, however, have few means to combat those problems. In fact, it is doubtful that they even necessarily recognize them as problems. The final draft of Sofia's first post-socialist plan, in fact, seems to endorse low-density growth on the urban fringe as if it is the natural result of the expected growth in living standards, as if Western-type sprawl represents some sort of a progressive phenomenon:

"It is not necessary to use the whole potential of the existing territories of the city; the growth in residential territory should be based on the increasing of standard of living, rather than population growth; and the over-populated urban territories should be renovated having in mind that the correlation between high residential density and poverty is [so obvious] that it needs no further proof" (*City at the Foot of Vitosha* 2002, 1: 4-7).

A separate planning document dedicated to the Vitosha region goes further as to label the low-density zones near the mountain as the "ecologically friendly zones" (*Partial Update of the General Development Plan of the Area under Vitosha* 1999). And, unlike many Western cities, Sofia has no design guidelines to ensure architectural contextualism in its historic center; such controls are deemed a violation of private property rights. Without them, Sofia's once gracious Art Nouveau streets will continue to vanish behind bright Marlboro signs and flashy silver new office buildings.

Nedovic-Budic (2001) argues that despite their flaws, socialist cities remained more compact, mixed-use, resource efficient, and better provided with public space than their Western counterparts. Thus, she argues, they represent a stage of development that Western cities have passed but wish to regain. The key challenge for post-socialist planners is thus to preserve the positive elements of the socialist heritage rather than replicate all Western errors, from sprawl to the destruction of historic architecture. Unfortunately, however, neither Sofia nor other post-socialist cities offer much hope that these errors will be avoided. Although in some cities like Prague there are stricter rules for preserving the historic center, while in others, such as Budapest and Warsaw, anti-sprawl coalitions have recently emerged (Garb 2000), the general post-socialist trends continue to be toward the further degradation of the historic identity of built forms, and the further private-led colonization of green spaces both in and around the city.

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