



Tsypylma Darieva, Wolfgang Kaschuba,
Melanie Krebs (eds.)

URBAN SPACES AFTER SOCIALISM

Ethnographies of Public Places in Eurasian Cities

campus

Urban Spaces after Socialism

Eigene und fremde Welten

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Sights and Signs of Postsocialist Urbanism in Eurasia: An Introduction

Tsy pylma Darieva and Wolfgang Kaschuba

The interest in urban spaces in Eurasia and their transformation in this volume is no accident. In putting together eleven case studies of seven cities situated on the margins of the former Soviet Empire, we have focused on ethnographic studies of public places to explore continuities and discontinuities in the reconfiguration of urban landscapes and societies after socialism. The book offers fresh insights into changing physical contours, social aspects and meaningful imaginaries in different public spaces from Tashkent to Tbilisi, from St. Petersburg to Osh. Whereas the first part of the volume discusses physical and symbolic contours of the city, the second part addresses the social dimension of Eurasian urbanism and voices heard in these places. Referring to the current fragile political stability as well as the privatization and globalization processes in a new geopolitical situation, the authors of this volume describe and analyze cultural and social meaning of contested public places. Some of them discuss the ways local urban memories and narratives of places are reflected in the voices of residents and subcultures, other contributors investigate the means by which ordinary residents appropriate public places beyond the mainstream paradigms and master narratives of the city image. These sights and signs of postsocialist urbanism are once again building a laboratory for new social distinctions and spatiality in the region where Europe meets Asia.

The recent literature on »spatial turn« and »place meaning« has significantly contributed to the theory of the spatial dimension of culture, sociality and the politics of locality, including the urban context¹, but these concepts have rarely been discussed in the context of the (post)socialist

1 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Doreen Massey, »Places and Their Pasts«, in: *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995), pp. 182–192; Setha M. Low, »Towards an Anthropological Theory of Space and Place«, in: *Semiotica* (2009), 175, pp. 21–37; Beate Binder, *Streitfall Stadtmitte. Der Berliner Schlossplatz* (Cologne: Boehrlau, 2009).

city and its dramatic transformation. All of the cities (Baku, Gyumri, Osh, Tbilisi, Tashkent, Yerevan) in this volume, except St. Petersburg, are involved in their own specific way in the post-Soviet world as geographically and symbolically peripheral cities located on the southern margins of the former Moscow-Kremlin center. The spaces described here were previously subjects of the Soviet order, which often controlled them from the »center«, and became objects of localized reorganization and contested re-imagining for the future. Since obtaining independence, »first« (capital cities) and »second« cities in Central Asian and South Caucasian states have been actively engaged in the processes of »postcolonial« nation-building and globalization, as represented in public places, monuments, museums, advertisements, and cultural events. Whereas some recent historical and sociological works illuminated the spatial and cultural dimensions of urban transformations in Russian cities such as Moscow or St. Petersburg², the Eurasian cities of the South Caucasian and Central Asian areas have remained extremely under-researched despite occasional outbursts of geopolitical interest. The case of post-Soviet cities is largely terra incognita³ and a study of postsocialist Eurasian urbanity has not yet really developed. This volume approaches this issue from the perspective of the study of public urban spaces.

2 Blair Ruble, *Money Sings. The Hanging Politics of Urban Space in post-Soviet Yaroslavl* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995); Karl Schloegel, Frithjof Schenk and Markus Ackeret (Eds.), *Sankt Petersburg. Schauplätze einer Stadtgeschichte* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2007); Karl Schloegel, *Moskau lesen. Die Stadt als Buch* (Berlin: Siedler, 2000); Monica Ruethers, *Moskau bauen von Lenin bis Chrusčev. Öffentliche Räume zwischen Utopie, Terror und Alltag* (Wien: Boehlau, 2007); Thomas Boren, *Meeting-Places of Transformation: Urban Identity, Spatial Representations and Local Politics in post-Soviet St. Petersburg* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2010); Cordula Gdaniec (Ed.), *Cultural Diversity in Russian Cities. The Urban Landscape in the Post-Soviet Era* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

3 See Tsypylma Darieva and Wolfgang Kaschuba (Eds.), *Representations on the Margins of Europe. Politics and Identities in the Baltic and South Caucasian States* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2007); Thomas Borén and Michael Gentile, »Metropolitan Processes in Post-communist States. An Introduction«, in: *Geografiska Annaler, Series B* 89 (2007), 2, pp. 95–110. The Russian journal *Antropologicheskii Forum* (Vol. 12, 2010) initiated a valuable discussion towards the present and future of urban studies in the former Soviet Union. See: http://anthropologie.kunstkamera.ru/06/2010_12/, last accessed on July 14th 2011).

Yet it is the marginality of Eurasian cities in both geography and disciplinary approaches that brings together and separates Europe and Asia. Two area studies disciplines, Slavic Studies and Central Asian/Middle East Studies, have staked out their claims to the region: the former because of the long-standing influence of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union on the Caucasian and Central Asian societies; the latter because of the large proportion of Muslim populations and the no less considerable historical impact of Middle Eastern cultures and civilizations on the region.⁴ Moreover, there is a remarkable diversity in local understandings of the cities' geopolitical orientations and their images, ranging from the sense of being a European city, expressed by referring to presocialist and socialist modernist master plans, and simultaneously being »marginalized« and »Asian« by referring to preserved traditional urbanism in opposition to the Russian colonial center. This process of hybrid and ambivalent belongings is reflected in current physical forms, surface designs, symbolic economies, local cultural interpretations and claims by users of public spaces. Cities like Tbilisi, Baku or Tashkent offer an exciting area for historical and empirical in-depth studies and a comparative analysis of emerging societies. The papers presented in this volume are initial steps in understanding the Eurasian urbanism and intensity of its change.⁵

In reference to Henri Lefebvre and Setha Low's approaches to exploring and analyzing urban spaces, this book addresses the question of the social production and construction of public places in the context of post-socialist urbanism as a way of life. Whereas political scientists, historians and linguists have extensively researched the transformation of socialist

4 See Bruce Grant and Lale Yalcin-Heckmann (Eds.), *Caucasus Paradigms: Anthropologies, Histories and the Making of a World Area* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2007) as well as Tsyplima Darieva and Viktor Voronkov, »Rethinking the South Caucasus. Introduction«, in: *Laboratorium. Russian Review of Social Research* 1 (2010), pp. 17–27.

5 Among the few works on culture and history of Eurasian cities see Jeff Zahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865–1923* (Indiana University Press, 2007); Taline Ter Minassian, *Erevan. La construction d'une capitale à l'époque soviétique* (Rennes Cedex: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007); Catherine Alexander, Viktor Buchli and Caroline Humphrey (Eds.), *Urban Life in Post-Soviet Asia* (London: Routledge, 2007); Kristof Van Assche, Jozeph Salukvadze and Nick Shavishvili (Eds.), *City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi. Where Europe and Asia Meet* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009); Paul Stronky, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

urban spaces on a macro-level⁶, they have rarely focused on the rapidly changing politics and cultures of everyday life on the micro-level. One would be mistaken, however, to see these developments solely associated with the structural change and linear transition from the totalitarian to the democratic society and a radical break with the past.

Our aim is not to exoticize the meaning of remote places, but rather to identify the distinctiveness of urban spaces and common global trends in the process of spatializing urban culture and human experiences after socialism on the micro-level. Similar to Eastern Europe, we face in this part of the world a growing creativity and complexity of cultural representations of urban spaces on the one hand, and newly emerging hierarchies, inequality and social exclusion, on the other hand. The questions are: How are new urban identities in Eurasia, including city symbols and place brands, represented, managed and appropriated by different social groups? How do people transform and reinterpret urban space into their own places beyond the perspectives of grand narratives?

The meaning of urban spaces

We have chosen to use the metaphor of »(post)socialist urbanism« to designate a dynamic of peculiar and near-universal change occurring in the process of the reconfiguration of urban spaces by local authorities, the influence of global trends and flows, and the ways ordinary people respond to this change. Whereas the city as a venue for popular activity deserves our attention as much as or more than the state in Eurasia, we emphasize that »place remains fundamental to the problems of membership in society«.⁷

6 Sasha Tsenkova and Zorica Nedovic-Budic (Eds.), *The Urban Mosaic of Postsocialist Europe. Space, Institutions and Policy* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2006); Kiril Stanilov (Ed.), *The postsocialist City. Urban Form and Spatial Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe after Socialism* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010).

7 James Holsten and Arjun Appadurai, »Introduction: Cities and Citizenship«, in: *Cities and Citizenship*, ed. by James Holsten (Durham: Duke University, 1993), pp. 1–20; Warren Magnesson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience* (Toronto: University Toronto Press, 1996), in particular p. 16.

The dismantling of the Soviet social order and its representations are most emblematic in cities, in those particular public spaces where state socialism manifested and marked its power and symbols in a different manner than in the countryside, and where resources were often more plentiful, as conflicts and contested places are today.

The growing mass of critical literature on the studies of Eastern European and former Soviet societies under transition rightly emphasizes the plurality of socialisms and diversity of postsocialist transformations and experiences.⁸ While some ethnographers have examined aspects such as the economy, ethnicity, religion, food, violence, borders, migration, and social relations of these societies, by conducting their field work in the city, the city and urban space have mainly been treated as background rather than as a focus. Moreover, until recently, anthropologists have tended to neglect the analysis of the built environment as a cultural construction and as a spatial expression of social life. Architecture in the urban context has been taken for granted in this research and was »often seen as a static reflection of symbolism or cosmology«.⁹

The concept and theorizing of »postsocialist urbanism«, its specific distinctions in (re)configurations of public places and its meaning for residents, have rarely been a topic of discussion in the social sciences. Over the last few years, human geographers have developed a considerable interest in the relationship between the organization of the urban built environment, cultural landscapes and political regimes in Eastern European cities. It is certainly true that city landscapes are incorporations of power and local politics and policy, organized in a specific place. However, from an anthropological perspective, the material or ideological side of this transformation is dominant in the analysis of human geographers. The voices of people who inhabit these places and experience the changes in their environment imposed by officials, city planners and new actors, are of-

8 Chris Hann (Ed.), *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia* (London: Routledge, 2002); Chris Hann, *Socialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Local Practice* (Routledge: London 1993); Caroline Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2002); Melissa Caldwell (Ed.), *Food and Everyday Life in Postsocialist World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2009).

9 See Caroline Humphrey, »No Place like Home in Anthropology. The Neglect of Architecture«, in: *Anthropology Today* 4 (1988), 1, pp. 16–18, in particular p. 17.

ten overlooked in these works. As Catherine Alexander rightly noted, »the area of international relations, politics and geography tended to emphasize macro-politics and urban management. The voices and experiences of the people who lived in the cities and actively shaped their environment were not heard until after 1991.«¹⁰ Still, anthropological and sociological studies of social context in the Soviet-style built environment have focused mostly on the materiality of the home, the dwelling or the domestic sphere and private domain.

We have already cited several scholars believe that architecture and the structures of cityscapes embodied in streets, plazas, and edifices have the power to define the social behavior and cultural identities of a city's population. The material world may function as a mediator for identity, and a semiotic approach can reveal the symbolism of suggested authoritative narratives. The contributors of this volume explicitly and implicitly emphasize that the built environment and public places such as parks, streets, markets waterfronts or bath houses derive their significance and relevance from processes of social interaction. This view is in line with that of the anthropologists Simon Coleman and Peter Collins¹¹, who suggested that ethnographic examination of culture as actually lived in everyday existence can show how ideal aesthetic and moral principles embodied in architecture are constantly subject to multiple appropriations and transformations.

Providing a comparative analysis of the postsocialist transition in Eurasian societies through the lens of public places is one of our attempts to understand the variety of local responses and the sharp variation in contemporary urban spaces of city capitals. Sights and signs of postsocialist urbanism feature a mix and hybridity of old and new ways of appropriating a public place, of the continuity of dominant state power in its public representations, neoliberal economy, everyday corruption and haphazard attempts by civil society, in the form of subcultures, artistic performances and youth culture, to inscribe its own signs into the cityscape. This social

10 Catherine Alexander, »Reconfiguring Post-industrial Cities: a Comparison between Almaty and London«, conference paper, workshop *Urban Spaces – Caucasian Places. Transformations in Capital Cities* (22–23.09.2009, Tbilisi).

11 Simon Coleman and Peter Collins, »Constructing the Sacred. The Anthropology of Architecture in the World Religions«, in: *Architectural Design Profile* (1996), 124, pp. 14–19.

phenomenon is not new; a »hidden« production of own signs in urban sites can be observed during the Soviet times.

Apparently, during the course of privatization processes, urban citizens experience less uniformity in public spaces and increasing significance of land value surfaces such as housing, shopping malls, restaurants and cafes in central and peripheral parts of the city. The restructuring of ground floors and cellars in socialist block *khrushchevkas* in all of the cities examined in this volume has changed the face of the streets significantly in the last two decades. Public consuming spaces no longer display signs starkly describing their monotone functions for collective behavior: Dairy, Bread, Hairdresser, Shoes, Electrical Products, Books; but rather, bear unique or individualized names. Post-Soviet peripheral elites such as the »new Georgians« or »new Armenians« leave their personal marks on the cityscape by erecting »neo-triumphal towers« and »white villas«, which remain often stylistically isolated from their urban contexts, where the entire resident population still lives in socialist block apartments. Similarly, the desire to transform the appearance of Soviet standardized housing as quickly as possible generated superficial imitations of Classicism, Baroque, or Empire Style, neo-triumphal facades on the ground floor of four-story functionalist brick *krushchevka* blocks; sculpted lions and other animals, chic Japanese gardens, and small artificial caves with fountains at the entrance and inside restaurants, yards and parks are now omnipresent in Eurasian cities.¹² As Paul Manning identified, »the ›theatricalization‹ of balconies and facades over internal infrastructure literally reduces Tbilisi to a kitschy collage of superimposed balconies«.¹³

12 See in Alim Sabitov, »Sovremennaya gorodskaya kultura Almaty i iskusstvo kitcha« [Contemporary Urban Culture in Almaty and the Art of Kitsch], in: *Sovremennaya arkhitektura i stroitelstvo: problemy i perspektivy razvitiya: materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii* [Contemporary Architecture and Construction: Problems and Perspectives of Development: Materials from an International Academic-Practical Conference at the Eurasian National University] (Almaty: Astana, 2006), pp. 54–56; Alim Sabitov, »Kitsch in the Contemporary Urban Environment of Kazakhstan«, paper at the conference *National Identity in Eurasia I: Identities and Traditions* (Oxford: 22–24.03.2009).

13 Paul Manning, »The City of Balconies: Elite Politics and the Changing Semiotics of the Postsocialist Cityscape«, in: *City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi. Where Europe and Asia Meet*, ed. by Kristof Van Assche, Jozeph Salukvadze and Nick Shavishvili (Lewinston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), pp. 71–102, in particular p. 89.

The rapid transformation of public places in post-Soviet cities takes different forms, but three processes are central for all of the cities discussed in this volume: the first is the decay of the Soviet order in city planning and shrinkage of the public domain (planning without General plan); the second is the arrival of a new consumer culture – a kind of »arcadia of consumption«¹⁴ brought about by the privatization of public spaces, global capitalism and international migration. The third common feature of postsocialist urbanism can be identified in terms of the ethno-nationalization of urban life and city imaginaries. These processes lead to a kind of liminality of urban spaces defined by the coexistence of old and new social orders for place production, control and its social construction. In this regard, it is in these cities that the accessibility to places and everyday practices is contested by an emerging plurality of place identifications in a formerly uniform city, by memories of a multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan past, and by the ethno-national present.

The legacy of urban socialism

A recent discussion on the relevance of the anthropology of post-socialism more than 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall has shed light on the core questions of social, cultural and historical transformation and revealed the need to return to socialism itself, »to excavate our knowledge of late socialist societies for unexpected insights.«¹⁵ Ten years ago Caroline Humphrey emphasized that it is unclear to what extent state socialism and its legacy define social organization and spatial orders in a time of uncertainty, when each action of citizens both reflects the previous way of life and represents a step toward a new, unknown order.¹⁶

14 Compare with Mariusz Czepczynski, *Cultural Landscapes of Postsocialist Cities. Representations of Power and Needs* (Adlershot: Ashgate, 2008).

15 Dominic Boyer and Alexei Yurchak »Postsocialist Studies, Cultures of Parody and American Stiob«, in: *Anthropology News* (November 2008), pp. 9–10. See also Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

16 Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life*, op.cit (note 8).

Public urban space provides a good example for the continuing usefulness of the term »postsocialist« in identifying the structures and trends of urbanism in Eurasia as a way of life. The urban public spaces, the institutions that controlled these areas and the practices of their appropriation, predominantly served the demonstration of political power and less the opportunity for everyday meetings, leisure, exchange and conviviality among ordinary people. The symbolism of public spaces in city centers, the infrastructure, ideological sights and signs of socialist urbanism were focused on the organization of people's behavior in particular ways. The social spaces in Eurasian cities should be perceived as experimental laboratories for socialist urbanism, an unprecedented change in terms of industrialization, architectural unification, and the Sovietization of urban life.

Among the key changes affecting the creation of socialist urban spaces was the introduction of the idea of the »socialist city«, which was viewed as an incubator of social transformation and as a vital force fostering the collective rather than individual identity, as production sites of the sense of social equality and ideological control, thus imbuing these places with a different emphasis and a more limited value of free public space than those in western cities.

Generally, the Soviet infrastructure and city planning authorities spatially ordered the streets and the design of the city surface by dividing the socialist cityscape into monumental centers, industrial zones and peripheral *microrayon* marked by uniformed apartment blocks, housing schemes and green belts. This hierarchical spatial division of city zones is still visible and functioning in many post-Soviet cities today. Moreover, the »vanishing spaces« fractured and shaped by state socialism, while neglected or abandoned in Eastern Europe, still persistently influence the contours of Eurasian cityscapes, memories, and the ways residents shape their knowledge about urban life. Though the socialist icons like the Lenin monuments, the Palace of Soviets, or the House of Culture have disappeared over the last 15 years or have been neglected as undesired buildings, the socialist era edifices and signs are remarkably preserved with a new mean-

ing, name and design as »left-over« spaces of state socialism¹⁷ or as »new towers« of a fragile stability.

The socialist sense of urban life and order was intertwined with an understanding of the city as emblematic of modernity and progress. City planning was regarded as an important means of achieving political goals, whereby built form, physical characteristics and linear orders of spaces were considered to be the producer and principal stimulus in changing the social order and not simply an expressive product of culture. The state egalitarian program delineated the utopian struggle against a hierarchy of spaces and a struggle against a hierarchy of people.¹⁸ Apparently, the everyday life in the cityscape, including the spheres of leisure, consumption and domesticity (with the exception of the summer house *dacha*) were the sites of ideological intervention.

The ideal socialist city is usually defined by the dominance of state control over urban land use and the housing economy, leading to a high degree of planning and so-called uniformity of urbanized centers and public spaces. A set of representative and functional buildings, despite their local peculiarity with a »national and vernacular concern« in their form (House of Soviets, Houses of Pioneers, National Opera Theaters and National Libraries), followed the principle of »socialist in content and national in form«. Soviet-style stone monuments (Vladimir Lenin and World War II Memorials) were established as a ceremonial focus and socialist public art punctuated the Soviet townscapes. Thus, the public spaces in cities' centers were determined by the power of political control and surveillance, and this controlling system was then inscribed in the public places. Aesthetically, these places were shaped by socialist constructivism or Stalinist imperial monumentality, including wide, empty spaces regularly used for the demonstration of socialist values and achievements. As Reid and

17 Dunton Light and Young Craig, »Reconfiguring Social Urban Landscapes: The ›Left-over‹ Spaces of State Socialism in Bucharest«, in: *Human Geographies* 4 (2010), 1, pp. 5–16; Melanie Van Der Hoorn, *Indispensable Eyesores. An Anthropology of Undesired Buildings* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

18 Vladimir Paperny, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin. Culture Two* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Crowley emphasized, the penetration of the socialist ideology into public life and even into private spheres was crucial for the socialist spaces.¹⁹

Along with the monumentality of the city center, the degree to which a cityscape as a whole could be described as socialist in its physical organization is largely a matter of the extent to which it was dominated by the system of microrayon, the socialist apartment block. The design of microrayon with its blocks of indistinguishable flats, few grocery shops (*gastromom*), centralized *univermag* shopping and service centers *dom byta*, was usually located so as to serve between four and ten neighborhoods. Cheap public transportation networks, such as trolley buses and metro stations, connecting the microrayon to the center, were created even in cities whose population numbered less than one million (as in the case of Yerevan). Constructivist-style kiosks selling newspapers and simple lemonade vending machines defined a scarce landscape of socialist services. Embedded in the design of the European ideal for a Garden City²⁰, the proletarian »cultured leisure« was spatially organized in Houses of Culture²¹ and in green open zones. The main aims in constructing and producing the urban space of the microrayon were to create an egalitarian urbanism, to elevate the significance of peripheral areas and to diminish the importance of a powerful city center that was usually more attractive due to its history, better services and supply of consumer goods.²²

Thus, early Soviet projects in restructuring urban spaces were directed at improving the life standards of working-class people at the expense of

19 David Crowley and Susan Reid (Eds.), *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

20 In Britain, according to Ebenezer Howards's concept, Garden City was intended to be planned addressing the disparities between city and country, thus containing proportionate areas of residences, greenbelts, industry, and agriculture.

21 See the ways how the House of Culture is revived in provincial Russia in forthcoming: Brian Donahoe and Joachim Otto Habeck (Eds.), *Reconstructing the House of Culture: Community, Self, and the Makings of Culture in Russia and Beyond* (New York: Berghahn, 2011).

22 David Smith, »The Socialist City«, in: *Cities after Socialism. Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Postsocialist Societies*, ed. by Gregory Andrusz, Michael Harloe and Ivan Szelenyi (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), pp. 70–99; Katerina Gerasimova and Sofia Chuikina, »Ot kapitalisticheskogo Peterburga k sotsialisticheskomu Leningradu: izmenenie sotsialno-prostranstvennoi strukury v 30-e gody«, in: *Normy i tsennosti pousednevnoi zhizni v Rossii, 1920–1930-e gody*, ed. by Timo Vihaveinen (St. Petersburg: Neva, 2000) pp. 27–74.

other social groups, in particular that of the presocialist elite. As Catherine Alexander noted in regard to Stephen Kotkin's description of the construction of Magnitogorsk²³, the industrial socialist city would provide light instead of the darkness of the capitalist industrial city; equal, comfortable living spaces, separate industrial and residential zones and efficient transport between urban sectors. These ideal projects of standardization were only partly implemented in the cities, and the quality of the facilities did not match the expectations of city planners and city residents.

In the 1970 and 80s there was considerable academic discussion around one key question: Is the socialist city fundamentally different from the city in capitalist societies? If so, what were the defining characteristics of the socialist city? To what extent was the process of urbanization in socialist cities different from that in western cities? Some scholars revealed that urban life in socialism was not fundamentally different from that in capitalist societies; however, a less diversified, less marginalized, and more calculated order was dominant in Soviet cities due to collective sentiments and egalitarian ideals. Others have criticized this view by pointing to the heterogeneity in the socialist city, the continuation of geographic inequality in urban spaces, and the high degree of social and ethnic segregation in non-Russian cities such as Tbilisi and Almaty²⁴. Others have emphasized the multiplicity of pre-socialist and socialist legacies in the region and pointed out that socialism was not the only factor shaping urban landscapes at this time.²⁵ In reference to the last two approaches and instead of trying to solve the dilemma between denying the Soviet past and acknowledging the strong influence of the socialist heritage on the nature of Eurasian cities, we suggest looking at these changes from another perspective. Our

23 Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998).

24 See in David Smith, »The Socialist City«, op.cit (note 22), R.A. French and Ian Hamilton, »Is there a Socialist City?«, in: *Socialist City. Spatial Structure and Urban Policy*, ed. by R. French and Ian Hamilton (John Wiley and Sons, 1979), pp. 1–22; Issues of regional inequality between western and eastern parts of the former Soviet Union see, for example, in Roland Fuchs and Georg Demko, »Geographic Inequality under Socialism«, in: *Annals of Association of American Geographers*, vol. 69 (1979) no. 2, pp. 304–318.

25 Benjamin Koup and Helius Milerius, »Vvedenie«, in: *P.S. Landschafty. Optiki gorodskikh issledovaniy* (Vilnius: Evropeiskiy University, 2008) pp. 7–36.

question is: To what extent can postsocialist cities in Central Asia and the South Caucasus be defined as postcolonial cities?

The post-Soviet Eurasian city as a postcolonial city?

The discourses on the socialist city as a metaphor of »light against darkness« lead us to the next questions, namely whether the urban spaces after socialism can be analytically described as post-colonial spaces? Whose lightness and whose darkness is being discussed here? The authors of the essays of this volume document the current changes in urban spaces of Eurasian cities, of those cities which, due to a specific historical presocialist and socialist restructuring, experienced significant assaults on the make-up and meaning of built environments and traditional ways of life. This important aspect leads us to the assumption that it is fruitful to apply the term »postcolonial city« to the changes experienced by the Eurasian cities such as Tashkent and Baku throughout the 20th century. The implicit and explicit comparison of post-Soviet urban identities with postcolonial cities and their spatial regime in the papers by Stefan Kirmse, Gayane Shagoyan and Tsypylma Darieva, invites the reader to rethink the meaning and metaphoricity of the socialist legacy for the development and representation of urbanism in Eurasia.

By the terms »colonial city« and »postcolonial city« we mean the ways the materiality and sociality in Asian and African cities were reshaped in the 19th century by radical breaks with local ways of indigenous urbanity and the construction of the colonial administration in large and smaller cities. Colonial cities in the Muslim Middle East and elsewhere were founded on a distinction and segregation between the proper colonial citizens and the elite living in planned spaces, and the masses of urban poor and recent migrants, who were concentrated in traditional *mahalla*, often regarded by colonial rulers as urban slums.²⁶ The spirit of European

26 Compare Janet L. Abu-Lughod, »The Islamic City – Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance«, in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987), 2, pp. 155–176; Michael Gilson, *Recognizing Islam. Religion and Society in the Modern Middle East* (London: Tauris Publishers, 2000); Anthony King, »Actually Existing Postcolonialisms: Colonial Urbanism and Architecture after the Post-

openness in its ideal form is considered to be different to the Muslim tradition of spatial organization of the city, and was reinforced through the construction of wide straight streets and edifices built in a European style. By contrast, open squares, quays and promenades as typical and symbolic »stagings« of bourgeois culture, have never been a main concern of city planners in traditional Muslim urban settlements which were characterized by a limited accessibility to residential areas and open public space.

The European dimension of Eurasian cities' surfaces, driven by Russian colonial power and planning, finds its material expression in the 19th-century construction of the administrative »colonial district« in the city center, such as the still representative Rustaveli Street in Tbilisi (formerly Golovinskiy prospekt), Abovyan Street in Yerevan (formerly Astafevskaya ulitsa), Istiklal Avenue (formerly Nikolaevskaya ulitsa) in Baku, and Amir Temur Boulevard in Tashkent (formerly Kaufman Boulevard). This gave the city European image. During socialism, due to industrialization and urbanization, the cities in southern Soviet republics were again changed significantly in terms of their physical configuration, and, in some cases, new representative centers were established close to the historical one, as in Tashkent or Yerevan. The European ideals of secular spaces, the Garden City and the value of open spaces for strolling, sports and »cultured leisure« were appropriated by socialist city planners and architects and contrasted with the traditional Muslim closed neighborhood with narrow dead end streets and few public spaces dominated by religious centers and local markets.

Obviously, in all cities discussed in this volume, there were variations regarding the extent to which the historical legacy of the Russian Empire and Soviet-style socialist planning replaced the pre-existing urban fabric. We are dealing with partially changed cities and perhaps all of these cities in their own ways can be considered less socialist cities in comparison to Russian cities. The striking point is that a very substantial element of their presocialist past was retained: traditional street mappings, overcrowded accommodation in Muslim neighborhoods, environmentally undesirable

colonial Turn«, in: *Postcolonial Urbanism. Southeast Asian Cities and Global Processes*, ed. by Ryan Bishop, John Phillips and Wei Wei Yeo (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 167–183.

industries and other sub-standard housing, which are just some of key problems that the colonial and feudal past bequeathed to socialism.

Presocialist traditional neighborhoods with narrow streets and single-family houses were preserved first and foremost due to their utility and the shortage of housing space in Soviet cities. It is significant that the *chastnyy* sector (private housing) in Yerevan and Baku was mostly located in traditional neighborhoods that were spatially separated from the monumental socialist city as well as from the structured microrayon zones. Despite the changes wrought by Soviet governance, there remained districts full of cramped, poor housing and low environmental quality that were in opposition to the idea of the absence of social segregation in socialist cities. Located in old parts of the city, these places created its own value, an alternative space for small private handicrafts and informal services that flourished in the South Caucasian cities during socialism. The physical and social organization of these inner urban neighborhoods made them places of local communal housing based on traditional ways of street corner life (to settle close to relatives) and unauthorized exchange.²⁷ In Yerevan, for example, individually designed consumer goods, dresses, and shoes were illegally produced in these neighborhoods by »non-socialist elements«, i.e. rural newcomers and diasporic repatriates from the Middle East.

Many cities in the Soviet South Caucasus and Central Asia preserved their historical ethnic spatial division that finds its expression in the existence of ethnic neighborhoods such as Jewish, Armenian, Muslim or Uzbek mahalla. Russian-speaking professionals, working-class people, and settlers usually lived in central parts of the city and in new apartment blocks microrayon. In »indigenous neighborhoods«, the one- or two-story houses with one shared courtyard and lacking modern technical facilities, were residential places for local working people, mainly recent migrants from rural areas. Whereas in Tashkent, the capital city of Uzbekistan, traditional neighborhoods have been labeled a symbol of the feudal backward

27 Stephanie Platz, »The Shape of National Time: Daily Life, History and Identity during Armenia's Transition to Independence, 1991–1994«, in: *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. by Daphne Berdahl (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000) pp. 114–39; Ter Minassian, *Yerevan*, op. cit. (note 5); Evgeniya Zakharova, »Street Life in Tbilisi as a Factor of Male Socialization«, in: *Laboratorium. Russian Review of Social Research*, Vol. 1 (2010), pp. 182–204.

past that must be destroyed, in Tbilisi and Baku they have been preserved due to their aesthetic value and enhanced as a smart exotic and ethnic peculiarity for the Soviet branch of tourism. Today there is a strong tendency to visibly renovate these buildings and open the way to a subsequent gentrification process of the entire area.

The approach of identifying Eurasian cities after socialism as postcolonial spaces provides a basis for working out how the change in the built environment and the social space can be perceived from macro-perspectives. Nevertheless, it would be too simplified to derive the study of postsocialist urban space solely from this conceptual perspective. The national capitals in the South Caucasus and Central Asia differ from each other greatly in terms of size, economy, and composition of populations, regional significance, geopolitical status, and urban culture. In terms of their architecture and physic-spatial layouts, Baku, Tashkent, Yerevan or Osh experienced a significant assault and standardized reconstructions during the pre-Soviet and Soviet period, but they are not a distinctively colonial product. One should take into consideration the specificity of the relations between the imperial center and the periphery as emphasized by Adeeb Khaled regarding the Central Asian experiences during socialism.²⁸ In terms of the cultural transformation of urban landscapes, there is a specific order of the »national in form, socialist in content« ideology that made urban experience in Eurasian cities more complex. One can recognize the power of indigenous architects and the incorporation of local elites and traditional signs into the aesthetics of socialist urban spaces, which diffused the socialist uniformity. A local peculiarity and a modernist »tradition« were expressed in appropriating nuances of local architectural surface design, art and music. But we should not forget that local architects and elites usually received their education in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The interesting point here is that the cultural imports in the course of the Soviet

28 See in Adeeb Khaled, »The Soviet Union as an Imperial Formation: A View from Central Asia«, in: *Imperial Formations*, ed. by Ann Stoler, Carole McGranahan and Peter Perdue (Santa Fe: School of Advanced Research Press, 2007), pp. 123–151. Laura Adams brought into discussion some interesting arguments for employing postcolonial theory in the studies of Central Eurasian societies. See in Laura Adams, »Can we Apply postcolonial Theory to Central Eurasia?«, in: *Central Eurasian Studies Review* 7 (2008), 1, pp. 2–7.

master plan are consistently presented as authentic indigenous developments.²⁹

Thus, the conclusion drawn by some contributors cannot be assumed as a sharp separation between colonial Russian and non-Russian colonized spaces. Rather, as Paul Manning stressed in one of his recent publications, »Unlike many ›Oriental‹ cities that underwent ›European‹ colonization, such as Tunis [...], the opposition between ›European‹ and ›Oriental‹ architecture that developed in Tbilisi under Russian rule was not entirely an opposition between the old and the new, but rather, the two architectural streams developed almost simultaneously.«³⁰

The (post)socialist urbanism and global forces

The authors of this volume discover a growing cultural diversity in urban spaces, and simultaneously a counter-phenomenon of disconnectedness. As Artyom Kosmarksi points out in his paper: »The fall of the Iron Curtain has brought about not only openness and freedom, but, paradoxically, also immobility and isolation – the traffic in Siberian cities is collapsing due to the decay of Soviet infrastructure³¹; the borders of the newly independent states divide families and turn once routine trips to a neighboring village into a bureaucratic nightmare.« The topic of disconnectedness is closely related to a process of enthusiastic ethno-nationalization of public spaces that builds a framework for many contributions in this volume. Oleg Pachekov, Zaza Shatirishvili and Paul Manning discuss this issue in the context of cultural imaginaries of the new urban home.

This disconnectedness notwithstanding, the postsocialist city is no longer a bounded unit defined by the socialist economy and national homogenized pride represented in official media, guide books, maps and websites.

29 Compare Marina Frolova-Walker, »National in Form, Socialist in Content. Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics«, in: *Journal of American Musicological Society* 51 (1998), 2, pp. 331–371.

30 Paul Manning, »The City of Balconies«, op. cit. (note 12).

31 Compare with Caroline Humphrey, »Rethinking Infrastructure: Siberian Cities and the Great Freeze of January 2001«, in: *Wounded Cities: Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalized World*, ed. by Jane Schneider and Ida Susser (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

Rather, it is increasingly shaped by its responses to powerful global forces. In this area there is a continually developing sense of the city as an actor on the world stage. The essays in this collection open up a new dimension for the exploration of the slow decay of socialism as a complex process that symbolizes not always the death of a particular utopia but also the breeding ground of new hopes and utopias. This process encompasses ways of imagining, representing and branding cities within the nation and in the global context. After economic decline and political uncertainty, postsocialist Eurasian capitals are once again building a space for celebrating new national regimes. Some cities undergo a remarkable process of city reconstruction by building their own Manhattan (Yerevan) and hatching new social groups that recreate city symbols. Melanie Krebs examines the changing meaning of the Baku landmark *Maiden Tower*, which under the auspices of Azerbaijan's First Lady became the subject of re-evaluation and marketing efforts to make the city attractive for global capital and foreign tourists. This process includes the expectations of the new elite that certain low-income groups ought to make sacrifices for the good of the nation, leading to the relocation of low-income people, small shops, street vendors, and housing units from the city center to the outskirts of the city.

Another visible sign of the postsocialist urbanism and the new utopia is associated with the increasing significance of religious places and religious symbols in urban life. Under Communist rule, sacred places and houses of worship were transformed into secular places such as warehouses, laboratories, or museums, or left as tourist attractions and billed as the cultural heritage of the imperial or colonial past. Nowadays, churches, mosques, and synagogues have been imbued with a new meaning in urban everyday life; they occupy a prominent space in the city landscape. One can observe a transformation of abandoned and secret hidden spaces into vibrant places of communication (see paper by Rumansev and Huseynova), conflict and power as they are in the forefront of a powerful process of reshaping the city center. Levon Abrahamian explores both the uneven relationships between sacred buildings and present-day public discourses in Yerevan, which present various mechanisms of manipulating sacred and profane memories, and the sometimes aggressive ways of re-appropriation of sacred places by religious institutions supported by local governments.

Today, it seems that the »unknown order« and informality of postsocialist urbanism in the 1990s is turning into a new combination comprising the return of strong state power, a restoration of state-imposed spatial regime and a neoliberal capital. The decay of the »Soviet Byzantine« and the destruction of Soviet symbols is not the only outcome of the dramatic transformation of public spaces. In spite of the changing surface and globalized aesthetic representations in these postsocialist cities, we observe the maintenance or reusing of former socialist places and a reevaluation of Soviet-style totalitarian orders in a new national guise. In her contribution Tsypylma Darieva identifies the continuity of a strong state presence in cooperation with neoliberal economic structures by analyzing the accessibility of a public space in Baku, spaces once open to all and now controlled by wealthy elite.

Along with the main ideological message imposed by new elites and global capitalism onto public spaces in postsocialist cities, scholars discuss how the spaces also create room for interpretative freedom and the manifold voices of underprivileged residents. Some authors of this volume focus on the city as a particular place where residents are not only passive admirers or losers of rapidly changing urban landscapes, but also active actors who negotiate the form of their places and the ways in which public spaces can be used and reproduced, thus influencing the image of their city. Oleg Pachenkov shows the power of marginalized losers in St. Petersburg, focusing on how pensioners and low-income families struggle for their social place and nostalgic materiality within the flea market in *Udelanya*.

Another phenomenon of the nostalgic attitude to the socialist past is demonstrated by the fact that many city residents still refer to streets by their old Soviet names. In her paper Madlen Pilz addresses the gap between socialist and postsocialist authoritative visual representations of Tbilisi on city maps and the everyday perceptions among ordinary residents and how they playfully make use of three different layers of the city's surface depictions. In reference to Doreen Massey's insightful argument³², we wish to emphasize the multiple readings of the past that exist in these situations, including the symbolic construction of the urban landscape embodied in city maps.

32 Doreen Massey, »Places and Their Pasts«, in: *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995), pp. 182–192.

The socialist structure and the totalitarian regime were always contested by opposition and dissent known in Russia as underground *samizdat* movements and located in half public-half private spaces like the small kitchens of socialist apartments.³³ Yet the ways in which ordinary residents, subcultures and youth create their gathering places in peripheral Eurasian cities has received little attention until now. In some cases, the Eurasian urban communities created their own places and voices for alternative consumerism, signs of subcultures and links to the West during the late socialist period. Sergey Rumyansev and Sevil Huseynova note how the metaphorical idea of Baku as a »New Orleans on the Caspian« created a peculiar public urban space for local cosmopolitan intellectuals who loved jazz music and developed a unique vernacular jazz style in the café *Druzhba* (Friendship). The globalization of cultural identities and consumer taste among young male students in postsocialist Osh, analyzed by Stefan Kirmse, takes its own form. Drawing on extensive ethnographic research, he points to the existence of »nested« globalization with an unprecedented range of cultural repertoires from Islamic rhetoric to rap music. The creative ability to make linkages to global cultural flows and to (re)shape the public spaces for their own in former Soviet marginalized cities occurred simultaneously with the subordination to the powerful state and ideological manifestations.

The Tbilisi street experiences provide another point of departure for studies of postsocialist Eurasian urbanism. Paul Manning and Zaza Shatirishvili look at the changing meaning of stereotypical urban Bohemia in Tbilisi as embodied in the figure of the street peddler *kinto* and popular *dedopala* dolls, which force one to go beyond the tendency to describe socialism as creating only a gray, monolithic and monotonic culture of the cityscape. Shorena Gabunia provides a similar insight in this volume into the subculture of social groups by describing the changing character of

33 Zdravomyslova Elena, »The Cafe Saigon Tusovka: One Segment of the Informal-Public Sphere of Late-Soviet Society«, in: *Biographical Research in Eastern Europe. Altered Lives and Broken Biographies*, ed. by R. Humphrey, R. Miller and E. Zdravomyslova (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 141–177. Alternative consumer cultures and underground activities of the last Soviet generation in Moscow were documented by Alexei Yurchak. See Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

»hidden places« (bath houses, cafés or parks) of the gay scene in socialist and postsocialist Tbilisi.

We seek to understand multiple local voices on the construction of urban space, the networks of connections among places that link micro- and macro-levels, links between a specific public space and its city's image, the interplay between rootedness and growing cosmopolitan interconnectedness with the rest of the world, and to identify various modes of »local« accommodation to »global conditions«. The contributors have shown that this perspective can be traced at the level of the city image as a whole or at the level of individual edifices, streets and neighborhoods. Places are socially constructed by the people that use them. Based on the plurality of inhabitants' voices found in the places where we carried out field work, we argue that one place can be perceived in multiple ways by different social groups and individuals. There are still few studies of alternative memories of the socialist past in the sense of a civil urban life, alternative movements, underground political activities and medial interventions in Eurasian cities.

Regarding future research, we suggest examining more closely the similarities and parallels between socialist and capitalist societies, postsocialist and postcolonial cities, since we need a more comprehensive comparative approach to help us to understand better the legacy of socialist social inequality and spatial hierarchies and to refrain from setting-up a »ghettoized« dimension of postsocialist studies. Referring to this approach, we argue that we should employ multilocality, the concept that describes places influenced by an imperial past, socialist »colonial« modernity, the global context and a fragmented postmodernity. We argue that it is the socio-cultural change of the political order, and the framing, design and sociality of public spaces that define postsocialist urbanism. Urban landscapes in this region merge declining Soviet planned infrastructure with a new body of confusing architecture not necessarily associated with the revitalization of urban life in ways that are attractive to either local or international inhabitants. To understand the changing images of the city and its public places, we must focus our research on academic literature relating to historiography and individual identity; public policy in the city, in particular with regard to memorializing its past; and informed discussion in the local press, online forums and blogs, where valuable perspectives