

# THE FIRST SENTENCES OF POST-SOCIALISM

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- It has long been argued that the logic of socialist urbanisation in Eastern Europe produced a somewhat different type of city from those in Western regimes.<sup>1</sup> For several decades, urban geographers of East-Central Europe have asked themselves whether there was such a thing as the “socialist city”: a city whose spatial characteristics were sufficiently different from those of its counterpart in the developed capitalist world (especially in Western Europe) as to warrant the very existence of the term “socialist city”.<sup>2</sup> Urban living had a particular significance in the formerly centrally planned countries: on the one hand, it facilitated the fulfilment of ambitions for industrialisation and signified progress, and on the other hand it encouraged collective rather than individual identity with the aim of creating a socially just society.<sup>3</sup> Socialist rule stifled markets and often left store shelves bare.<sup>4</sup> The collapse of state socialism placed the urban planning systems of Central and Eastern European countries in a state of flux.<sup>5</sup> A celebrated postsocialist anecdote suggests that ‘socialism was the longest and most painful road from capitalism to capitalism’.<sup>6</sup> What is happening in a central European city whose socio-spatial structure, urban life and culture have been heavily influenced by a totalitarian political regime and a centralised command economy during the Communist period?<sup>7</sup> Until the early 1990s, the process of urbanisation in extensive parts of Eurasia took place under conditions of central planning.<sup>8</sup> Central and Eastern European (CEE) cities have been under a centralised command economy for periods varying from 45 to 75 years.<sup>9</sup> Modern wars and revolutions (whether violent or peaceful) have more than once transformed European political boundaries and structures.<sup>10</sup> In 1989, European socialist countries crossed into a new ideological category of post-socialism.<sup>11</sup> 1989 was an extraordinary year, a year when the world watched breathlessly as the Berlin Wall fell and, one by one, the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe tumbled – a year which truly changed the face of the world.<sup>12</sup> One of the most enduring images of the twentieth century was the dismantling of the Berlin Wall.<sup>13</sup> It was ‘the final nail in the coffin of the modern ambitions’ for Bauman, ‘the last nail in the coffin of any sort of Marxist credibility’ for Harvey, the ‘end of history’ for Fukuyama, and ‘[t]he triumph of liberalism, of capitalism, of the Western democracies over the vain hopes of Marxism’ for Latour.<sup>14</sup> The demise of socialism ushered in a radical process of transformation in the economies, politics and societies of all post-socialist states.<sup>15</sup> The crash of the socialist system sent shockwaves throughout the economies of the Central and Eastern European countries.<sup>16</sup> The collapse of state-socialism in 1989/90 generated a far-reaching social and economic transformation in Eastern Central Europe.<sup>17</sup>
- The postcommunist world is of interest for several reasons.<sup>18</sup> The early years after the fall of communism were marked by a focus on political and institutional change.<sup>19</sup> After the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe the socialist concepts of

growth and development were replaced by capitalist concepts of growth and development.<sup>20</sup> Following the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, one of the first priorities of the reform governments was to transform the system of ownership.<sup>21</sup> The transformation of socio-economic life which began in post-socialist countries at the end of the 1980s manifested itself first of all in the cities.<sup>22</sup> Segregation reshapes residential landscapes in post-socialist countries.<sup>23</sup> One of the most notable processes of metropolitan restructuring occurring in Eastern Europe since the end of communism in 1989 has been that of suburbanisation.<sup>24</sup> In the cities of East Central Europe high-status gated residential enclaves emerged after the collapse of communism symbolising the new dimensions of social segregation brought about by the post-socialist transition.<sup>25</sup> Is increased socioeconomic residential segregation a necessary consequence of the introduction of market reforms and of the increase of income inequalities in the formerly socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)?<sup>26</sup> Most of the literature on privatisation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has concentrated on the introduction of macro economic strategies and institutional reform with very little having been written about the impact of privatisation on individual households.<sup>27</sup>

Eastern Europe has been through a turbulent period of transition since 1989.<sup>28</sup> In the last fifteen years, transition economies in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States have experienced highly dramatic change in political, economic and social terms.<sup>29</sup> Arguably, post-socialist transformation, understood as the economic, political, institutional and ideological changes associated with the discarding of 'communism' or 'state socialism' and the embracing of 'capitalism' in Central and Eastern Europe, has been taking place for at least twenty years.<sup>30</sup> For more than twenty years, CEE countries have faced similar problems in political, economic and societal systems.<sup>31</sup> The centrality of 'capitalism' to discourses of post-socialist transition is now widely acknowledged.<sup>32</sup> Fifteen years after the sudden collapse of the socialist system, half of the Central and Eastern European countries that bravely toppled their communist regimes announced the successful completion of their transition to market-oriented democratic societies.<sup>33</sup> With the accession of 10 post-socialist states to the European Union and the steady approach of the twentieth anniversary of the events of 1989, we hear more and more calls for the end of post-socialism.<sup>34</sup> The questions I am concerned with are both historical and futuristic.<sup>35</sup>

*This paper is in its entirety composed of first sentences collected from academic literature that takes post-socialism as its subject. The collection of sentences is organised into a coherent narrative, which, in its form and in its argument, resembles the forms and the arguments of the literature it draws from. At the same time, the repetitive rhythm dramatises narrative archetypes that are produced and reproduced in this literature.*

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