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Totalitarian Flower Pavilion: The Dubious Post-Socialist Legacy of Contemporary Eastern European Cities

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Abstract

More than three decades after the collapse of state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe, local urban processes are still very often associated with that historic period or post-socialist transformation. This article aims to undermine the concept of the post-socialist city itself as reductionist, given the crucial importance of factors that differ from the influence of the pre-1989/91 times. The article confronts the discussion on the applicability of the post-socialist framework with field research conducted in selected Polish and Ukrainian cities, in particular the examples of the Kvity Ukrainy (Flowers of Ukraine) protest movement in Kyiv, Ukraine, and the 2003 spatial planning reform's results in Krakow, Poland. The analysis is based on interviews with representatives of different actors involved in the policymaking process, such as local government representatives, policy advisors, urban planners, journalists, business circles, and members of grassroots initiatives.

Keywords

CEE; Krakow; Kvity Ukrainy; Kyiv; policymaking; spatial planning; state socialism; urban policy

1. Introduction

With the passage of time since the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the influence of post-socialist factors on the current state of urban affairs in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) seems to be waning (Bajerski, 2020). However, it is debatable what is to be understood as post-socialist, whether the phenomena associated with the state socialist past are actually linked to it, and how strong this relationship is (Müller, 2019; Tuvikene, 2016). It seems that "the post- and regional attributes" typical to post-socialist studies are only important when "their presence has a particular and indispensable meaning (which is rarely the case)" (Gentile, 2018, p. 7).

The aim of this article is therefore to introduce the theoretical concept of dubious post-socialism. This concept does not assume that the state socialist past is no longer important, but questions the extent of its influence, treating it as an additional factor that merely modulates more important variables. The strict relationship between the different policies and urban forms of the former state socialist systems is dubious. They seem to be the result of various post-socialist course changes and external factors during the period of state socialism, such as the pre-socialist past and parallel non-socialist processes, for example, strong religiosity in Poland, which is the reason why numerous churches have been built after 1945 (Cichońska et al., 2019). Post-socialist phenomena can be, first, directly related to the old system (state socialist urban planning, for example, of newly-built cities around factories); second, organised in opposition to it (anti-communist rejection of the planning system in general, including spatial planning as something associated with the planned economy of the state socialist state); or, third, changed by post-socialism in parallel with the influence of other factors.

The topic of this article is the third aforementioned form of urban processes. I will try to show, using concrete examples (one from Ukraine and the second from Poland), that this type of post-socialist relations is particularly important. The first example is the protest movement against the demolition of a modernist pavilion in Kyiv, which can be placed in the context of a broader interest in the so-called themes of socialist modernism, i.e., various buildings located mainly in the former Eastern Bloc and Yugoslavia (BACU & Rusu, 2021; BACU et al., 2021; Hatherley, 2016; Jędruch et al., 2023; Springer, 2011; Veryovki et al., 2019). However, the example of the heritage protection movement analysed here focuses primarily on the cultural and aesthetic value of this type of architecture rather than on the relationship of such buildings to the state socialist period itself. The second example is the spatial planning policy reform in Poland that is sometimes associated with the post-socialist context (Büdenbender & Aalbers, 2019; Niedziałkowski & Beunen, 2019), which seems to be a superficial simplification, as the political changes after 1989/91 are linked with the historical period that preceded it rather than with other contemporary processes that have more to do with this reform.

The article is structured as follows. First, I introduce the limitations of the post-socialist framework in urban studies. Second, I explain the sample used in the study described in this article, and then I describe the methodology and data sources used. Finally, I discuss the results of the study and draw conclusions.

2. Possible Limitations of Post-Socialist Analysis in Urban Studies

The experiences of state socialist cities are not homogeneous, since the cities functioned in different geographical and cultural contexts, although mutual relations existed (Stanek, 2020; Stanilov, 2007). Therefore, these regimes went through different phases, resulting in changes that affected strategic urban planning decisions or even the visual forms of architecture. Moreover, the regimes also differed internally, and the differences further increased after their later collapse (Malý et al., 2020). This article looks at four examples of cities in two neighbouring countries (before 1939, three of them—Krakow, Lviv, and Warsaw—belonged to one state) where the beginning of the state socialist period did not begin at the same time. The consolidation of the dictatorship of the communist party in Kyiv took place in the early 1920s, while in other cases it did not begin until 1945.

The concept of dubious post-socialism presented here does assume that the state socialist past has played a role in today's urbanisation processes, even if it emphasises to a lesser extent the transience of post-socialist

processes in the fourth decade after the fall of the former regimes in CEE. The assertion that transformation continued was certainly justified as the former members of the Eastern Bloc adapted the entire legal systems to the realities of capitalism and for the sake of integration with Western economies (Sýkora, 2009). However, the perception that cities in this region are still in transition does not seem justified so many years after the 1989 revolutions—this period is almost as long as the entire existence of the previous systems. Sýkora and Bouzarovski (2012), for example, cite unfinished privatisation as an example of the importance of post-socialism, but property transformations need not necessarily take place between points A and B, and the alleged transition period may simply be a different model. Of course, there are common features in modern policy-making that are reminiscent of the state socialist past, but all of these urban regimes are going through different development trajectories that do not necessarily fit into a single post-socialist pattern (Hirt et al., 2016; Meyer et al., 2020). The post-socialist framework is still used, not only in older publications from the period immediately after the collapse of state socialist regimes (Koobak et al., 2021), but also by researchers dealing with welfare state regimes, who distinguish the post-communist model from typical models of Western capitalism (Piotrowska & Rae, 2018). This framework is also used to describe Poland and Ukraine, which are interesting from the perspective of this article, although it is worth noting that, for example, Mezentsev et al. (2015) wrote in the pre-2022 context, when the post-Maidan changes were not yet as established.

The perception of post-socialism as dubious suggests that it is highly controversial to give particular primacy to the state socialist past, as it is not necessarily a more important factor than other aspects, and although post-socialism still influences urbanisation and policy-making, its influence is limited and diluted—both by factors that are independent of the state socialist past and by those that instrumentalise it. Moreover, "like other major world centers, post-socialist cities represent nodes of global society and compete for places in the global and regional networks" (Nedović-Budić et al., 2006, p. 14). Urbanisation in the CEE countries is therefore only post-socialist to a certain extent, as it is also influenced by contemporary global and pre-socialist factors.

Under these circumstances, post-socialism functions more as one of the parallel variables modulating the course of urban development processes and not necessarily as a key variable. The spectre of socialism or communism, which are often equated (which is why I use the term state socialism in this article to distinguish the pro-Soviet type from other forms of socialist systems and ideologies), serves as a useful scapegoat to demonise various political postulates (Chelcea & Druță, 2016). This bogeyman is also used in many far-right conspiracy theories whose influence on contemporary urban policies is increasing (S. Fainstein & Novy, 2023; Sager, 2020). Socialism is associated with many phenomena that have nothing to do with it, for example, the issue of pedestrians' and cyclists' rights (although in the pre-1989/91 period relatively wide main roads were laid out to achieve the monumental character of public space, or favouring individual car traffic according to modernist urban planning guidelines). In the case of conspiracy theories and anti-communist populism, this is a more or less deliberate manipulation, but similar errors also occur in professional or scientific discourse as a result of the emphasis put on a superficial relationship to the state-socialist factor.

3. Differences and Similarities Between the Ukrainian and Polish Urban Worlds

The study described in this article was conducted in 2021–22 (the last interview in Ukraine was conducted on 18 October 2021, before the start of the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022) in four cities: two in Ukraine (Kyiv and Lviv) and two in Poland (Warsaw and Krakow). These are the two largest post-socialist states in the

CEE region, just behind Russia, which is the one most often analysed by researchers. These two countries are neighbours and culturally close, but institutionally very different, which is also a result of their pre-1991 status. Poland was an independent state then and Ukraine was a part of the Soviet Union. Nowadays, Poland is relatively well-developed economically, although the stability of the domestic political situation has become questionable after 2015 (Drinóczi & Bień-Kacała, 2019; Markowski, 2019; Smiecinska, 2020). However, these experiences are not comparable to the situation of Ukraine, which has been experiencing war and a foreign occupation of a part of its territory since 2014. Ukraine has also not undergone advanced integration into Western political and economic structures, unlike Poland, which is a member of the EU, NATO, and OECD, among others.

The selection of the above cities is based on the similarity of two pairs. The first consists of the economically and politically dominant national capitals, which are disproportionately larger than other cities in both states (Śleszyński, 2015; Zolkover et al., 2020). Kyiv and Warsaw have undergone major spatial changes and were the destination of intensive immigration after World War II (Cybriwsky, 2016; Grubbauer & Kusiak, 2012). At the same time, they show clear traces of the different types of state socialist urban planning. In both cases, the city centres representative in character have large sections in the socialist realism style; even the central streets, Khreshchatyk in Kyiv and Marszałkowska in Warsaw, are similar. In both cities there are also numerous large housing estates designed in a socialist modernist manner. Moreover, the general spatial composition is very similar—a clear division into a more developed western and a peripheral eastern part, in both cases concentrated around the country's largest river (Dnipro and Vistula, respectively).

Lviv and Krakow are also similar when it comes both to spatial shape and history. In the past, they belonged to the same region—Galicia (Eastern Europe)—and to the same states (Poland and Austria-Hungary). Today, they are cities of similar size (720,000 vs. 800,000 inhabitants) with an intensively developed tourism sector (Kowalczyk-Anioł, 2019; Rutynskyi & Kushniruk, 2020). The spatial structures of Krakow and Lviv were shaped over centuries of urbanisation and were not destroyed during World War II. Therefore, these cities can also be considered more "historical" than the aforementioned capitals.

In addition to the similarity of the cities analysed, the systemic institutional differences are an important context. In Poland, the changes brought about by the collapse of the state socialist system were implemented very quickly at the local level. Already in 1990, an independent local government, which had not existed during the period of state socialism, was reintroduced, and the 1990 local elections were the first fully democratic votes compared to the partially democratic parliamentary elections of 1989. In 1999, an even more advanced reform of local government was introduced, eliminating almost all remnants of the pre-1989 administrative structures (Ferry, 2003; Myck & Najsztub, 2020). The process of reforming urban planning procedures was also dynamic. In the early 1990s, responsibilities for land use were transferred to local authorities, and the legal acts regulating systematic spatial planning were completely remodelled, first in 1994 and then in 2003. The second wave of reforms radically changed the system and invalidated all previously adopted spatial plans, both those introduced before 1989 and those prepared before 2003 (Nowak, Mitrea, et al., 2023).

In Ukraine, changes of a similar magnitude took place with a considerable delay compared to its western neighbour. The first administrative reform in 1997 was of a limited nature and did not solve the fundamental problems related to the division of competences and the financing of local government. Serious changes were

only introduced in the course of democratic changes after 2014, when the process of amalgamating ineffective municipalities began (Horbliuk & Brovko, 2022). Spatial planning, which in the case of Poland was changed several times but comprehensively, in Ukraine is a mixture of Soviet regulations (e.g., Soviet general plans from before 1991) and modern solutions. To date, no separate legal act on spatial planning has been adopted following the regaining of independence (Nowak et al., 2021).

4. Methodology and Data Sources

The basic data source of this study are the opinions of policy-makers from the four cities mentioned above obtained thanks to semi-structured individual in-depth interviews with 84 people—49 in Ukraine and 35 in Poland. This qualitative study is not representative, but aims to differentiate the opinions of people who influence the policymaking process, such as local government representatives, policy advisors, urban planners, journalists, business people, and members of grassroots initiatives. Urban policy is multi-faceted and responds to "wicked problems" characterised by high uncertainty, complexity, and divergence (Head, 2022). In the case of urban policy, one can hardly speak of a linear formulation of policies in a closed loop from the formulation of the diagnosis to the final solution, and the implemented responses are downright chaotic and sometimes random due to the complexity of urban governance (Cohen et al., 1972; Lai, 2006).

All of this argues for using in this kind of comparative analysis, which describes different national, systemic, and urban policy contexts (Codd, 1988; Freeman & Maybin, 2011), methods more flexible than formal review of official documentation. There are often many contradictions between the officially stated goals of public policy and the solutions actually implemented. In Poland, for example, the radical right-wing populist government (Stanley & Cześnik, 2019; Szabó, 2020) at the level of policy planning declares the willingness to adopt sustainable development goals such as limiting individual motorisation (Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, 2022) and it supports the organisation of international mainstream urban conferences such as the World Urban Forum XI in Katowice (2022). On the other hand, politicians from the ruling party publicly criticise such policy solutions in order to accuse their competitors of supporting an overly ideologised, irrational, and allegedly extreme-left urban policy (Wojtczuk, 2018). However, even avowedly progressive decision-makers from the opposition implement solutions that are not necessarily in line with officially stated sustainable policy goals (Grzeszak, 2019).

The in-depth interview method is also useful to analyse the complex phenomenon of urban policy, which encompasses many fields and diversified sectoral policies influenced by different actors with various professional backgrounds, political views, and demographic characteristics. To ensure the greatest possible diversity of interviewees, I tried to distinguish respondents not only by four cities, but also by age (from 21 to 65 years), gender (47 men and 37 women), and the way they are involved in urban affairs. For this reason, I conducted interviews with 30 business representatives (mostly real estate developers), 34 officials (politicians from different levels of government and political environments, policy-makers, and other public sector representatives), and 42 grassroots activists, researchers, analysts, or journalists combined. The three numbers above do not add up to 84 interviews conducted, as these roles are performed in parallel for some individuals. It is even possible to combine all three roles (entrepreneurship, social engagement, political activity). The interviews were transcribed and then edited to ensure anonymisation and as a result of conducting them in different languages (English, Polish, and Russian).

During the interviews, decision-makers were asked what they thought were the most important historical events that influenced the current state of urban affairs in their cities, without suggestions formulated in advance or being given a closed list of options to choose from. There were 172 mentions in total, an average of two mentions per person, with the number of mentions per respondent ranging from one to five. On this basis, I made a selection of two events, which I discuss in more detail in the next section.

In addition to the sources mentioned above, field research was also conducted, including attending urban events such as conferences and public discussions as well as protests described in the article.

5. Case Studies

5.1. The Post-Socialist Heritage Protection in Ukraine

Ukrainian respondents named the Revolution of Dignity (2014) that led to a significant democratisation of their state as the most important event for the current state of urban affairs in Kyiv and Lviv—a total of 19 mentions in 49 interviews. Another name for this event is the Maidan Revolution, which derives from the central square in Kyiv that was the main scene of pro-democracy protests in 2013–14. As one of the interviewees pointed out, one of the networks that enabled the organisation of a long protest brutally fought by the security forces was a network of urban movements previously organised on the occasion of the defence of the Hostynnyi Dvir in Kontraktova square in Podil, Kyiv. The Maidan "was a manifestation of the right to the city" (KY12), this person claims. According to a local business representative, "urban policies in Ukraine are a mixture of Soviet economic planning and post-Maidan civil society tendencies" (KY06). For this reason, I have chosen another case study that is not this revolution itself, but its distant consequence: the protest movement against the demolition of the Kvity Ukrainy (Flowers of Ukraine) pavilion in Kyiv, a clear example of post-Maidan urban activism. This event was mentioned by the interviewees as crucial only three times (twice in the capital and only once in Lviv), but it is—as the statements of the interviewees show—a case that more people know about.

The Kvity Ukrainy is a modernist pavilion designed by Ukrainian architect Mykola Levchuk and completed in 1985. The project was appreciated by professionals from the beginning and received, among others, the Building of the Year Award from the Union of Architects of the Soviet Union. Originally, it was the largest flower shop in Kyiv, an institution that organised exhibitions and a research centre. However, after the dissolution of USSR, the property started falling into a state of neglect until it was finally bought by a real estate developer who decided to drastically remodel the site into a shopping mall with a coworking office. On 6 June 2021, the first protest against the investor's plans took place, and six days later the developer actually started demolishing the building. The protesters responded by destroying the fence around the site, and then they began to occupy the building to prevent further demolition to limit the extent of the damage and allow the main structure to be preserved (see Figure 1). On the same day, the protest was supported by the Ukrainian Minister of Culture, and in a longer context, a court battle with the investor began (Derevianchuk, 2021; Mamo, 2021).

Firstly, the court battle aimed at granting the building the status of a monument, which made reconstruction impossible, blocking the investor's plans. Second, it used the formula of strategic lawsuit against public participation, "a civil complaint or counter-claim filed against non-governmental individuals or groups because of their communications to the public or government on an issue of public concern" (Hurley &
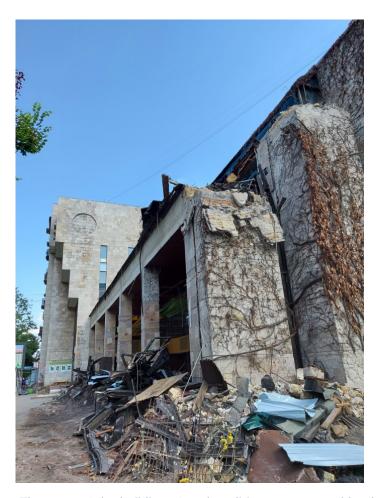
Figure 1. Kvity Ukrainy: The state of the building after demolition was stopped by demonstrators (July 25, 2021).

Shogren, 1997, p. 253). This lawsuit is about the reputation of the investor who sued the protester that first appeared in the protest area due to the proximity of his residence. At the time of writing (December 2023), the case is still ongoing, but it became the starting point of a broader movement of municipalist activists invoking the "right to the city" (Domaradzka, 2018; S. S. Fainstein, 2014; Mayer, 2012), including the Marsh za Kyiv (March for Kyiv) demonstration that took place on 2 October 2021. It was the largest municipalist demonstration in Ukraine in recent decades, announced at a happening next to Kvity Ukrainy.

The defence of Kvity Ukrainy took place less than a year before the Russian full-scale invasion started. At the time of the building occupation and the Marsh, the participants of these protests could not anticipate the events of February 2022, but the demonstrations took place already after the outbreak of war with Russia, which was actually initiated by the invasion of Crimea and the Donbass (2014) or the show of force in the form of the deployment of Russian troops on the Ukrainian state border with Russia (Spring 2021). All this affects the context of the struggle for the widely understood legacy of the USSR, which is associated with contemporary Russian imperialism, leading to an increase in anti-communist sentiments and the popularity of the idea of so-called decommunisation. In Ukraine, however, the latter is taking place later than in most countries in the CEE region (Demska & Levchuk, 2020; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006; Verdery, 2012). Paradoxically, Kvity Ukrainy serves as an example of Ukrainian cultural heritage for the protesters, as can be

seen from the statements of the interviewees. For a former journalist who now works in the private sector, it is indeed "Soviet heritage, but it was done in a good way" (KY16). A university student involved in the protest movement declares:

> Our opponents say: Oh, you glorify the Soviet Union and want to make a new start. It's not about glorifying the system or politics. It's about the people [Ukrainians] who created it with their own hands. Modernism is the design of Ukrainian architects, so we have to appreciate it as the design of Ukrainians who lived under this regime. (KY03)

A journalist from Kyiv (KY04), younger than the first person quoted and older than the second, thinks similarly ("Almost all [Soviet] art and architecture was created by people who were mainly in opposition to the regime or to some aspects of the regime, and they were all Ukrainians, so we should treat them with respect"), as do respondents of different ages from Lviv (young activist, LV14) and an older journalist. According to the latter, the Kvity Ukrainy movement is the first example of such an engagement in defence of a building erected in the Soviet era, while "usually people defend buildings constructed before that time" (LV20). Kvity Ukrainy also has a function and a form that contradicts the oppression of totalitarian architecture, argues another interviewee. A longer statement by a politician from Kyiv is worth quoting here:

> The USSR was bad, everything was bad, modernism is bad. In the case of Kvity Ukrainy, someone tried to tell us that it was a Soviet building and totalitarianism. I told these people that they were completely nuts: "This is a flower pavilion." And they said: "No, no, it's a totalitarian flower pavilion." What could be more humanistic than a flower pavilion? It's a building that's proportional to the street and has the best atrium in the city. "Totalitarian flower pavilion" is now my favourite joke! (KY12)

A law student (KY14) involved in the protest movement points out that the building also creates a court precedent. The object that the activists want to give monument status to is currently protected as the intellectual property of its designer, which restricts the investor's freedom of action. In this way, the building is not only separated from anti-communist associations, but also from the Soviet legal system or the chaos of the system transformation. During the latter, copyright protection was very limited and it was only with the policy development in independent Ukraine after 1991 that more serious intellectual property protection was introduced (Eugster, 2010; Soltysinski, 1969).

5.2. A Policy Reform in Poland

In Krakow, the event most frequently mentioned by respondents was the 2003 spatial planning reform: 8 out of 13 respondents from this city mentioned it. In Warsaw, on the other hand, it was mentioned less frequently (only 3 out of 22 respondents), although the issue of the poor quality of spatial planning and problems related to it came up in more interviews. This case is interesting because the reform took place later than the phase of reforms to adapt the legal system to the conditions of the democratic state and its free market economy. The new building code had already come into force a decade earlier (Act of 7 July 1994 on Building Law). The 2003 spatial planning reform was mentioned twice as often by respondents from Krakow as other top mentions in this city: the state socialist past (4 mentions), Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 (3), the 1990s transformation (3), or the long-term of the urbanisation of the city (3).

The Act of 27 March 2003 on Spatial Planning and Development served to adjust Polish law prior to the EU accession instead of dealing with the remnants of the state socialist past (Polanska, 2014). This happened several years after the collapse of the Polish People's Republic (1989), which led to the adoption of the much earlier Act of 7 July 1994 on Spatial Development (exactly on the same day as the above-mentioned building code). The 2003 law, which was considered controversial, ineffective, and conducive to corruption, abolished all previously existing plans and introduced the new planning system in a rudimentary form. After 20 years of the current law being in force, the total annual cost of this spatial disorder is estimated at more than 20 billion euros (Majewska et al., 2020; Śleszyński et al., 2020). In Krakow, the share of planned areas in the total area in 2021 was significantly higher (71.4%) than in the country as a whole (31.7%; Statistics Poland, 2023); however, there are still many areas that are built according to special procedures of the so-called building conditions (officially: the Decision on Land Development and Management Conditions). These decisions are issued as individual administrative decisions for investments in areas without spatial development plans: This hinders the coordination of spatial development and facilitates corruption due to the lack of transparency and public consultation when issuing individual decisions (Nowak, Śleszyński, et al., 2023). In 2021, over 163,000 such decisions were issued across Poland, of which 395 were issued in Krakow (a decade earlier, over 2,000 decisions were issued per year in this city; Statistics Poland, 2023). Figure 2 illustrates such decisions in Ruczaj, a neighbourhood often perceived as a blunt example of spatial disorder in Krakow (Klus, 2021; Wiśniewski, 2022). Although there is currently more systemic planning in this city than the national average, the spatial development of the area presented here is organised by building conditions decisions issued for many investments.

Figure 2. Decisions on Land Development and Management Conditions in Ruczaj, Krakow (2023). Source: Miejski System Informacji Przestrzennej Kraków (2023).

The map of such decisions is actually the complete blueprint of this part of the city, and the opinions of the respondents representing different professions correspond with this judgment. Many of the respondents talk about "plowing down" (KR03), "zeroing down" (KR04), "completely changing" (KR05) the planning system, which is the "original sin" (KR07) and the "rotten compromise with investors" (KR07). These statements refer to the cancellation of all previously valid spatial plans on the basis of the controversial spatial planning reform of 2003, which the interviewees from Krakow describe as an absolutely key event for contemporary urban policy. The authors of these statements are a high-ranked local government decision-maker, a local journalist, a member of national parliament, and a city councilor, respectively, declaring different political views. Similar critical opinions are also expressed by policy-makers from Warsaw, although somewhat less frequently than by their colleagues from Krakow. One Warsaw journalist points out that this is the city's "main problem," which is why even a particularly prestigious investment (the Varso Tower) is being realized on the basis of this particular procedure related to the lack of local spatial planning (WA04). However, the area that this interviewee highlights is not the legacy of the communist past, but the contemporary community of capitalist Western countries (the tallest skyscraper in the EU).

The liquidation of spatial planning is a "very old thing" (KR04), explains a 30-year-old journalist, for whom it is therefore a distant past. Such an opinion, it should be emphasised at this point, does not come from a person who has insufficient knowledge of the historical context and knows nothing about the state socialist period; this interviewee correctly gave the year 2003 as the date of entry of the law described into force and correctly located many other historical events. Similarly, a policy analyst of the same age described the destruction of the planning system as "an urban legend he heard from [his] mom" (KR10). These statements are not so much evidence of the short memory of the younger interviewees but rather a proof that a long time that has passed since the aforementioned reform (almost half the period of communist party rule in Poland).

The case is assessed quite similarly by a developer from Krakow, whose memories of this period are short and only cover early childhood. During the interview, this person complains about the quality of spatial planning based on a disparagingly inaccurate diagnosis of the initial situation. This investor compares such actions to the well-known Polish film *Man—Woman Wanted* (1973) directed by Stanisław Bareja. In this popular comedy, a character of a communist party apparatchik works as a "director." Symbolising communist incompetence, this decision-maker orders the lake to be moved, which is easy to do on a mock-up but difficult in the real world. According to KR01, this is not a satirical story from the past, but an almost real description of some contemporary methods of thoughtless spatial planning in contemporary Krakow. This reference is to the cultural text describing the new institutional order, not the pre-1989 practises. The same interviewee believes that "the last intelligent, spatial planning idea in Krakow was the plan for Nowa Huta. Beautiful…a masterpiece" (KR01)—a district of Krakow that was built entirely during the period of state socialism.

6. Conclusions

The historical event most frequently mentioned by Ukrainian respondents was the Revolution of Dignity (2014)—the moment that led to a significant democratisation of their state. In Poland, this function seems to be fulfilled by the second phase of spatial planning reforms from 2003, which replaced the older, purely post-socialist law from 1994. Both events are rather consequences of the transitional period of the first decades after the collapse of state socialism and close this transitional period, which is why it is controversial

to regard them as the embodiment of post-socialism. Indeed, there are many remnants of the former state socialist system in both states—post-Soviet master plans in Ukraine, countless examples of the built environment in both states, and a phrase mentioned by many people, including some of the interviewees, a specific "state socialist mentality" (Sharafutdinova, 2019). However, the component referring to the aftermath of the historical period before 1989/91 is not necessarily the leading one in this mix.

The Kyiv case described in this article proves not so much post-Soviet nostalgia, but several other contexts: Ukrainian national pride directed against Russia, copyright protection almost unknown in state socialist systems, and modernist architecture also present in Western capitalist countries. This process also functions as the concept of the right to the city, which manifests itself in both Poland and Ukraine as a slogan or even the name of various urban initiatives in all four cities. However, such a framework has nothing to do with the past before 1989/91. Urban grassroots initiatives were not possible on a larger scale in societies deprived of freedom of speech, where the revival of local government was only possible after the collapse of state socialism. It is precisely the decentralisation resulting from this process (which has since developed intensively in Ukraine) that has been associated with the progress of democratisation (Kaliuzhnyj et al., 2022; Levitas, 2017; Oleinikova, 2020; Swianiewicz, 2003).

What really unites urban areas in the former Eastern Bloc are also non-post-socialist features: Western-born urban managerialism and neoliberalism (Harvey, 1989; Kinossian, 2022; Peck et al., 2009); contemporary conspiracy theories influencing urban policy (S. Fainstein & Novy, 2023); and various other phenomena of a more global nature that can be found in virtually any urban context (Robinson, 2005, 2022), such as the financialisation of housing, the privatisation of commons, global warming, etc. The correct identification of processes that are not necessarily unique to the post-socialist urban world or its individual parts is important for understanding the processes and events related to contemporary urbanisation. Moreover, Russian imperialism not only is based on the traditions of USSR, but stems from a much longer colonial tradition of the Russian Empire (Velychenko, 2002; Wolff, 1994). It is the lack of understanding of this fact that enables the popularisation of racist theories such as the need for alleged "denazification" as a justification for the Russian invasion (Kuzio, 2023; Rossoliński-Liebe & Willems, 2022). The misunderstanding and orientalisation of urban processes in CEE is often the result of interpreting all events in this region only in the context of a period in its past that lasted only a few dozen years and whose main common feature is the absence of occurrences in the Western urban world. As I have tried to show in this article, the scope of the impact of this period is limited, even when it comes to policy reforms related to post-socialist factors or discussions about the built environment created during the state socialist period.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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