

Academic year 2017/2018

Post-socialist strategic urban planning
as the meeting point of traveling ideas
and intertwined geographic imaginaries.
The case of

SOFIA CITY

Kuneva, Radoslava

Supervisor: Rosa Maria de la Fuente Fernandez

Second reader: Joshua Grigsby

September 1, 2018



TABLE OF CONTENT

I.	INTRODUCTION	3
	1. Setting the problem	3
	2. Research question	4
II.	LITERATURE REVIEW	8
	1. Global cities versus ordinary cities	9
	2. Urban governance and the post-socialist city	10
	a. Urban governance, rescaling of power	10
	b. Thinking post-socialist	12
	c. Post-socialist and civil society	13
	3. Discourse turn and the importance of narratives in political studies	16
	a. Discourse turn and the importance of narratives	16
	b. Planning as imagineering	17
	4. On traveling ideas and urban policy mobility	18
	a. How they travel	20
	b. Why they travel	21
	5. The importance of geographic imaginaries	24
III.	METHODOLOGY	26
	1. Comparative (through elsewhere) and interdisciplinary	27
	2. Selection of case study	28
	3. Analytical approach	29
	4. Methods	30
	5. Fieldwork	32
	6. Limitations	35
IV.	MAIN FINDINGS	36
	1. Historical review of urban planning in Sofia.	37
	a. Post-socialist strategic planning	38

b.	Moment of change	40
c.	Conclusion	41
2.	Map of actors	41
3.	City of many strategies. The findings of the discourse analysis and the observations of strategic documents and strategic initiatives in Sofia	44
a.	Current active strategies.	45
b.	Current strategic initiatives of the city	47
c.	Conclusion	50
4.	How do ideas travel? How are they used? Summary of the data collected mainly through interviews	51
a.	How do urban policies travel	52
b.	Uses of traveling ideas in the strategic planning	54
c.	the actual translation of the policies and implementation in the city	60
d.	the topic of data	62
5.	The importance of geographic imaginaries	63
V.	CONCLUSION	70
VI.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	75
VII.	APPENDIX	79

INTRODUCTION:

Isolation is impossible in the contemporary world, and policy transfer has become a fact of everyday life in various countries... post-communist countries have been especially willing to emulate the West.

(Randma-Liiv, 2005: 472, quoted in Stead, de Jong, and Reinholde, 2009)

Setting the Problem:

Cities live in a world of cities (Robinson, 2011). Traveling ideas and mobile urban policies circulate the globe. This travel is intensified in a globalizing world (Harris and Moore, 2013; Healey and Upton, 2010). People often put urban problems in the same terms and apply common solutions in various places around the world. This phenomenon could be seen in urban strategies – trends such as “green”, “smart”, “livable” city are being used on an international scale. It is also visible in concrete mobile urban policies transferred, or better - translated (Mukhtarov, 2014; Stone, 2012) from country to country, crossing continents.

Knowledge about “best practices” and “success stories” should show other cities the possibilities – how to deal with a local problem, how to position the city on the map, how to transform the city into the next success story. Such circulating urban experience and knowledge could be used as a common pool of inspiration.

However, traveling ideas are often a subject to geographic imaginary, power relations and governance structures. Such connections could well continue the west-east or north-south analytical divide in urban studies. The geographies of traveling ideas are not neutral – they represent the way actors and institutions engage in the global world.

Furthermore, traveling ideas could serve as an illustrative argument for local urban actor’s agenda. As the theory has discussed, mobile policies usually do not land in their original image in another place. Contrary, they are partially borrowed, translated; they can even become a parody of the original urban practice (Healey and Upton, 2010). The

actors and institutions involved in the local urban level are of huge importance. Often the success story of another city could be used to depoliticize the public debate and to push forward specific agenda. Lastly, the experience of other cities could be partial, superficial, and one-sided.

The power of the geographic imaginary and the traveling ideas is too big to be ignored. In a highly communicative world, cities live in constant links and various flows with each other. In urban policies and urban planning, this results in urban borrowings, translations, and overall constant references to the experience of others.

On the scale of Europe, this is highly present, through policies of Europeanization (Featherstone, 2003). Being part of the Union, or even being part of the idea of what “European” means, pushes cities towards similar strategies for the future of urban development. Through urban networks, traveling experts, international conferences, and presentations – the urban policies are in constant contact. Information is easily approachable and highly valued.

As the introduction quote suggests, there is no isolation from what other cities are doing. There is a trend, however, for West-East transfer of policies (Stead, de Jong and Reinholde, 2014). It is said that the post-socialist countries are “lagging behind”, so for them to “catch up” with their western neighbors, it is vital to quickly implement the necessary decisions (Stead, de Jong and Reinholde, 2014). The discourse of time difference is of huge importance, as the post-socialist is being dismissed as a source of contemporary urban policies (Robinson, 2002, Tuvikene, 2016). For the planning of post-socialist cities, it is usual to look at the example of others and to shape their world accordingly.

Post-socialist strategic urban planning is a meeting point of traveling ideas and intertwined geographic imaginaries. The focus of this thesis is thus how traveling ideas are used in urban planning in a post-socialist context.

Research Questions:

- **How and to what extent the geographic imaginaries and the traveling ideas are influencing the post-socialist strategic urban planning in Sofia, Bulgaria?**
 - What are the post-socialist elements of the strategic urban planning in Sofia?

- What are the geographic imaginaries of the urban planners in Sofia?
- How are traveling ideas traveling in the case of the urban planning of Sofia?
- How are traveling ideas used in the strategic urban planning of Sofia?
- **Are the involved actors referencing the same places with the same intentions?**
 - What are the differences and why?
- **How could this knowledge be used to add to the literature on urban planning and urban studies?**

What the text is looking at is the way cities plan themselves, according to the connections they have with other cities. Planning is a conflictual field, the political decisions involved and the multiplicity of governance and stakeholders are in constant negotiation and confrontation. Thus the actors and institutions are at the fore of the research questions.

I will hypothesize that the post-socialist urban planning will make use of traveling ideas and references to foreign urban success. The foreign experience will be used by each of the actors, differently and will lead to normative apolitical statements for the future of local urban development.

Post-socialist is a debatable term. To have a post-socialist city, first, there should have been a socialist one (Hirt, 2013). Scholars such as Hirt, Ferencuhova, and Tuvikene continue the utilization of the term in contemporary urban studies. For Tuvikene (2016) it is of huge importance to redefine what exactly is post-socialist in one city, as the whole city could not be post-socialist. In the same line of thought, others (Hirt, 2013, Ferencuhova and Gentile, 2017) made the nuanced distinguish between the complexities of one city, because the city could be simultaneously many things.

Usually, the literature on urban planning and urban policies is centered around the changes in the recent decades – from urban governing to urban governance (see: Pierre and Peters, 2012; Jouve, 2005; Rhodes, 1996; Swyngedouw, 2005). Urban governance is broadly defined as the communication between various stakeholders for the achieving of a collective goal (Pierre and Peters, 2012). The critique of urban governance comes from post-Marxists scholars such as Swyngedouw and Rhodes. According to them the recent governmental changes put the democratic process at stake. The power over

decision making was rescaled (Brenner, 2004) on multiple levels – international, national and local. The city gained a certain level of autonomy and employed new mechanisms for collaboration with citizens and business. A path-dependency towards neoliberalization could be seen in this new ways of governance. The accountability is washed away; the participation of citizens is used as a token for pushing forwards already taken decisions (Rhodes, 1996; Swyngedouw, 2005).

Talking about post-socialist urban planning in this context, I will try to elaborate on both sets of literature and try to find the common in both. Post-socialist experience has been absent in a lot of the urban literature or is put aside as too specific and not universally relevant. Thus the dialogue between the urban governance and the post-socialist is not an easy task. Without making claims of thoroughness and success, this text is combining literature from both academic fields.

The idea of Jenifer Robinson for considering cities as ordinary has a huge influence on the methodology of this master thesis. The aim of decentralizing the attention to cities around the world, away from the “usual suspects” of the urban theory is a well-established need, especially in postcolonial theory. Robinson (2006) argues that all cities should be seen as ordinary – each city is relevant to urban theory, each city could be the starting point of research. She makes the appeal to rethink what urban is, what modernity is, and to keep a wide dialogue between cities.

Furthermore, the master thesis is comparative, in the sense of thinking the case “through elsewhere”(Robinson, 2015). Thinking through elsewhere is the minimum comparative gesture we use as urban researchers. Thinking a place through another case, or through theory and literature written for another context, is the comparative gesture. The thesis consists of a case study, part of which is tracking the connections between one place – Sofia, and other cities that have some influence over the urban planning of Sofia. The comparative gesture is further present in the analysis of geographic imaginaries and traveling ideas in the urban planning in Sofia.

Sofia city is my home city – it is where I was born and where I lived almost all my life. Acknowledging that the requirement for internationality is not met, I can only defend my decision of choosing Sofia as my case. Planning is ultimately a discourse – a narrative and practices, embedded in a specific context. Knowing the language and the history and culture of the place gives me great advantages in analyzing the data collected during the

field work. However, I was not interested in presenting one specific story, this of Sofia; on the contrary, I was seeking to find the abstraction of the specific case, which could be used as knowledge for other cities as well. One way, I did that was through the literature – literature on traveling ideas and imaginaries, the literature on the post-socialist and the urban governance. Secondly, I mapped the links between Sofia and other cities in the field of urban planning – this brought out an international picture of connections and influence. Even if the map itself is specific, the idea behind it, I will argue, is valid for a wider set of realities and places around the world.

During my work, the theory and the field were in constant interaction. My observations on the strategic planning in Sofia began the winter of 2016. However, the clear research question and literature review were not ready until the spring of 2018. The field work was carried on between June and July 2018 and consists of observations, analysis on three strategic planning documents and three strategic urban planning initiatives, and eight interviews. The collected information was analyzed based on two main principles: actor-centered institutionalism and discourse analysis.

The thesis is divided into a three-part classic form. The first part is the Literature review. This initial part of the work consists of separate chapters, elaborating of academic literature from different scholar fields: post-socialist, urban governance, urban planning and of course – traveling ideas and geographic imaginary. One of the challenges of the literature reviews was to link literature to each other, in a more interdisciplinary approach. The second part of the thesis is the Methodology and introduction of the case – strategic urban planning in Sofia city. The methodology and the research design are discussed in this second part. The methods and the analytical frame are introduced. Finally, I summarize the field work and introduce Sofia in historical perspective. The last section of the work is the actual findings from the field work and the conclusion of the thesis.

I hope by the end of the read, the reader will have a better and more nuanced idea about what the post-socialist planning is, and how cities are connected to each other through the travel of “best” and “worst” practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Global Cities versus Ordinary Cities.

Globalization and urbanization are continuous processes, neither one nor the other are new or recent. However, the literature on global cities (Sassen, 2005) and world cities (Friedmann, 1986) are the focus of urban studies from the 80s onwards. As the body of work on global cities grew, so did the critique and the alternative ways of looking at the city. The emphasize of the role of the city in the global economy and politics lead to a saturation of the use of the concept of global cities and even to the peculiar adoption of the term for the branding and promotion of cities. As response, many scholars searched for alternative ways of exploring and explaining the globalization and its connection to the city. One of the main contributions in the field is the work of Jenifer Robinson. She (2006) looks at cities as “ordinary cities”, each city could be the subject of research and the source for urban theory.

Furthermore all ordinary cities live in a world of other cities (Robinson, 2006). Thus we, as urban researchers, should think about the city through this “elsewhere”. In the broadest sense, this is the comparative gestures we do when we look at one city, but we think it through other cities. The connections between these worlds of ordinary cities could be the topic of urban research, as an alternative viewpoint of globalization.

Thinking cities through elsewhere does not exclude the critical urban thought. Contrary, the production of urban knowledge currently is concentrated in cities seen as developed, modern and important. The variety of urban form is neglected. The concept of ordinary cities could help see cities around the world as worthy of investigation as the main source for urban theory. Furthermore, the dialogue between cities could be strengthened, leaving behind the strong developmental discourse present nowadays (Robinson, 2006). For the purposes of the current master thesis, I am using the concept of an ordinary city and the idea of globalization as constant flows of interactions.

That does not mean that the interactions do not follow an embedded path-dependency, even hegemony of power-relations. To better understand the world of “ordinary” cities, the next part of the chapter will elaborate on literature about urban governance and urban models.

2 Urban Governance And The Post-Socialist City.

2.1. Urban Governance and Rescaling Power.

Another important concept connected with the globalizing and urbanization of the world is the urban governance. Urban governance as Pierre and Peters (2012:71) put it “is about the formulation and pursuit of collective goals at the local level of the political system”. The urban governance consists of a variety of governing mechanisms. As the focus of this text is the strategic urban planning in its contemporary practice, urban governance theory is essential in understanding the wider context in which planning occurs.

On the scale of the city, the governing techniques had changed as a reaction to the globalization. Jouve (2005) explores how European states downscaled power to the metropolitan level. He argues that there is a change from the restructuring from the 70s, and the one happening in the 90s and onwards. The previous managerial logic transformed into an entrepreneurial approach, which offers “an opportunity to fundamentally change the “raison d’être of local institutions” (Jouve, 2005:290). For example, the public-private partnerships become a standard for the production of the urban space. The urban government took on a mediational role of communicating between different stakeholders. Urban governance could be summed up as: “the multiple ways through which city governments, businesses, and residents interact in managing their urban space and life, nested within the context of other government levels and actors who are managing their space, resulting in a variety of urban governance configurations (Peyroux et al. 2014).” (Gupta et al, 2015:4). Essentially the question of governance is a question of the public sphere and the relations between state (local authorities), market and civil society actors.

In European philosophy, the notion about public sphere is influenced by the work of Habermas. Habermas sees the public sphere as a bourgeois development. He has a normative view over it, and believes “it is possible to achieve a shared, collectively imagined, and context-related understanding of what is „true“ and what is „right“ and socially valid.”(Jessop, 1993). Counter-argument of such view could be found in the work

of Foucault. His theory of power relations emphasizes that outside universal reason could not produce the public debate (Jessop, 1993). Instead, power relations between actors, as well as discourses, will always be at work. Debates on urban governance tend to follow the logic behind one of the two Habermasian or Foucauldian approach.

Critical scholars such as Swyngedouw and Rhodes analyze the governance approach as a new technology of government in which the democratic process is at stake. Beyond-the-state governance according to Swyngedouw (2005) is Janus faced - promising empowerment of the people, but leading to a democratic deficit, due to its embeddedness in neo-liberal order. Rhodes (1996) sees the governance as a complement to market forces and existing hierarchies. Urban governance literature can inform the narrower field of urban planning. Urban governance as a concept is used in the development of this thesis as a context in which urban planning happens. It is not the main focus of the work. However, the presence of this shift from government to governance and the critical account of it is vital for the understanding of the urban policies. The push towards consensus, the attempt to arrange the various stakeholders around one idea, one motto and the depoliticization of the planning field are all elements of the urban governance I was expecting to stumble upon by researching strategic planning.

Nevertheless, I should acknowledge the fact that the literature on urban governance, new technologies of governing and urban planning is mainly written from the perspective of western and northern cities or global cities. Some of the exceptions are articles on participatory planning from South America (Caldeira and Holston, 2015), or collaboration practices in India and Africa (Albrechts, 2012). Post-socialist cities on their behalf are usually discredited as not modern or lagging behind concerning the contemporary world, so they are not a desirable research field for theoretical contributions (see Ferenčuhová and Gentile, 2016). Such position of the cities from the Eastern Block risks leaving them “off the map” (Robinson, 2002).

Following scholars, opposing this view, such as Hirt, Tuvikene, and Ferenčuhová, I would like to examine how the western-produced theories of urban governance play out in a post-socialist city. Is the experience different and in what way? Can this knowledge

contribute to the overall discussions and in what way? In this part of the text, I will summarize the literature debate on post-socialist cities.

2.2 Thinking Post-Socialist.

Debates on post-socialist cities start with the term itself. To have a post-socialist city means that at a given time there was a socialist city (Hirt, 2013). Scholars emphasize to a varying degree to what extent the socialist regime produced a city on its own, separate from its western counterpart. Sonia Hirt (2013) in her article “Whatever happened with post-socialist cities?” summarizes, from a build environment point of view, the specific characteristics of a socialist city and a post-socialist one. She shows, at least in the material build environment, the uniqueness of the urbanity, produced during the socialist regime and after it. The scale, function, and aesthetics after 1989, east from the Iron curtain did change fundamentally. The scale of the urban development shrank, the uses of the buildings changed, green spaces were sacrificed for the development of commercial and residential spaces of a new type, and cities lost their compactness by suburbanizing. However, she concludes that perhaps, looking at the post-socialist experience shows us that there is no homogenous post-socialist city or a capitalist city in that line of thought (Hirt, 2013).

To understand better how the post-socialist could be applied to research and theory we can look at Tuvikene and his article from 2016 - “Strategies For Comparative Urbanism: Post-socialism as a De-territorialized Concept.” According to Tuvikene (2016), there are three ways in which the post-socialist as a notion has been used by scholars – “as a container, as a condition and as a de-territorialized concept.” (Tuvikene, 2016:133). Below, I will elaborate on the three different ways of thinking the post-socialist.

The post-socialist as a container refers to a specific place in a specific time. This way of thinking locks the notion as characteristic for a number of places in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, in the transition after 1989 from socialist to capitalist cities. The notion is relevant only for that time and space and is not of interest to the global world. It also presupposes that it is a transitory experience, transforming with a clear trajectory - from a socialist entity into a capitalist entity. Tuvikene (2016) argues that this way of seeing the concept of post-socialist narrows the possibility of

dialog and comparison between cities from different regions. Moreover, it normalizes the western experience as the only possible one (Ferenčuhová and Gentile, 2016). Post-socialist as a condition gives more space for debates and possibilities. It refers to the hybridity of previously socialist cities, emphasizing a “long duree” of the urban character (Ferenčuhová and Gentile, 2016).

The post-socialist as a condition should simplify neither the socialist nor the post-socialist as „homogeneous, caricature“ (Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008: 323).(Tuvikene, 2016:136). Neither the socialist nor the post-socialist are a given, homogenous entity. More nuanced relations between past and present, between here and there are in play. Lastly, Tuvikene (2016) presents his approach towards the post-socialist as a de-territorialized concept as a more fluid and adaptive concept, allowing for comparative urban research with the potential of contributing to the global urban theory.

The post-socialist as de-territorialized means it is not specific only for a particular region, neither for a city as a whole. Parts of the city could be seen as post-socialist, others - as something else. Thus the ordinary nature of the city is put forward – that means every city is first of all “unique assemblages of wider processes” (Robinson, 2006: 109)” (as quoted in Tuvikene, 2016:140), where some of the processes are post-socialist. Further, he gives two ways in which the post-socialist manifest itself – as a continuity and as a discontinuity: “continuity of governmental technologies and spaces, and a form of anti-continuity that in a desire to be different is implicated through inscriptions of the past acting as a „constitutive outside”” (Tuvikene, 2016:141).

2.3 Post-Socialist And Civil Society.

As part of the public sphere, the civil society should be the one operating alongside with the state, exercising power over it and defending the public good through critical and reasoned arguments. On these grounds, the urban governance can claim its democratic nature. So in the next paragraphs, I will discuss the civil society in the post-socialist perspective. Critical literature on the topic is contradictory. It is mostly accepted that during the socialist and communist era, the public was seen as a representation of the party’s power (Císař, 2013). Manifestations and celebration with the citizens were

organized as a symbol of their devotion and agreement with the state. Civil organizations were supported and even mandatory if one wanted to be a “good” communist/socialist. However, these organizations were not an opposition to the government (Císař, 2013). The literature on post-socialist civil society could be seen in two positions – one stating that civil society in Eastern Europe and post-socialist countries are generally weak and a second position, seeing a “dynamism, flexibility and richness to the civil society organizations and movements” (Torsello, 2012). The first position, elaborated best in Howard's book (2003) sees the difference between East and West Europe concerning civil society as one, not of quality, but quantity (Torsello, 2012). However, critics of such position stress that it is not appropriate to use western criteria and notions in post-socialist countries (Torsello, 2012:182). The second position could be seen in Císař (2003), who talks about four ways in which the civil society in the post-communist regions is expressed – in trade unions, nonparticipatory activism, foreign-funded or foreign-based international NGOs and radicalization. With examples of each type, he shows how multi-sided and complicated the issue is. In a way, analysis of civil society in post-socialist countries differ because of how they use the term – as a container, condition or a de-territorialized notion. As a de-territorialized notion, we can see the complex reality of post-socialist movements, continuities, and discontinuities with the socialist public sphere, as well as the foreign impact of transnational NGOs and funding. Even if we rethink how we determine civil society and how do we search for it, there is one discourse that is predominant. It is a discontinuity of the socialist. It is what Sonia Hirt calls privatism - “[u]nlike privatization, which is an economic and political process of transferring material resources, privatism is a cultural condition which comes in reaction to the perceived gross failures of the socialist and post-socialist public realm.” (Hirt, 2012:4). Císař (2003), on his side, states that “[f]or postcommunist citizens, freedom literally meant the liberal notion of “freedom from politics,” not a republican concept of freedom to “take part in politics.” (Císař, 2003:2)

This widespread disbelief in the public could manifest itself in the unwillingness to participate in civic organizations or local and national politics. “The system” as many refer to it, is not working, it is broken (Gueorgieva, 2016). In her book, 'Iron curtains' Hirt (2012) engages with that exact privatism and traces it in the new resident architecture in Sofia. Through conversations with residents of newly formed suburbs

and gated communities, she explains what some of the reasons are for them to self-segregate behind tall walls:

“No more Big Brother stuff Weren't we done with the Big Brother thing years ago, eh? I have always wanted my own house with a yard, where I can do whatever I want to, go naked if I want ... and nobody can watch me” (Hirt, 2012:114.)

In a way, her research about privatism is quite informative for someone who is trying to research the public. In the last chapter of the book, Hirt tells the story of the grandchild of one of the self-segregated homeowners. It is a story of hope, as she, the grandchild, was part of a social movement for the protection of a public park in the city center. Hirt envisions that this privatism, could turn around and the care people have for their own properties could be broadened to encompass the whole city. Here is to quote the book itself:

“...why she fought to save the garden – a place far away from where she lives. She responded, “But please, how is it far? It's not that far, really! Isn't this our city? There are many students like me ... we like to hang out there. It's one of the best places, so we want to keep it like it's ours.” (Hirt, 2012:147).

In this section I attempted to show the complex public sphere, using the post-socialist notion as a de-territorialized concept of continuity and discontinuity (Tuvikene, 20..). Even though the mentioned cases are not specifically connected to strategic urban planning, they are important in my research. First is the notion about participation and involvement in public and political debates. Especially in the light of urban governance turn, where the democracy is legitimized through participation, the lack of public involvement will be a problem. Urban planning is one of the fields very difficult to be penetrated by the positive social change that Hirt describes at the end of her book.

If we accept the post-socialist as an aspect of a part of the city, it is easier to work with the concept of governance and post-socialism. Further introducing the idea of an

ordinary city, the dialogue between the two sets of theory could form a better dialogue. Sofia, capital of Bulgaria, is a city with a socialist past. It is also a city part of a member of the European Union, a multinational body, famous for implementing rescaling and restructuring national state government policies. According to Hirt, the prevailing privitism, a post-socialist attribute, is the main difference with a non-post-socialist context. Rescaling power and opening-up the governmental mechanism, as described from authors such as Pierre and Peters, Jessop and Swyngedouw, could be even more impactful in such context. The post-socialist building of walls is an interesting phenomenon that could inform the field of urban governance and urban models. However, more work is needed in order to create a stronger dialogue between literature and research about post-socialist cities and critical urban governance.

3. Discourse turn and the importance of narratives in political studies. Planning as imagineering.

3.1. Discourse Turn And The Importance Of Narratives.

Before continuing with the literature review towards the main subjects of this thesis - the traveling ideas and urban policy mobility, it is important to distinguish the theoretical frame in which such studies are positioned. After the discourse turn in social sciences much more detailed and interpretative work has emerged in the field of urban studies concerning the role discourses and narratives play in constructing the world we perceive.

Traditionally cities are looked at as numbers and statistics, visualized on a territory. However, the ways these numbers are lived receives more and more attention. Various accounts of the city became popular: from the personal accounts of Benjamin's urban childhood memories of Berlin to the concept of practices of everyday life (De Certeau, 1984), where the citizens shape their urbanity. What is important to understand is that the urbanity, the city, is not one always constant and fixed entity with tangible shape and limitation. The city is a construct of our own. Moreover, the city is constructing us. For the aims of this master thesis, I will concentrate only on the meaning of narratives and discourses in the urban planning and urban policies. However, it is important to mention

and always keep in mind, that the city is not only the urban plans and maps. It is a vast and incomplete multilayered live artifact.

“Narratives matter—narratives that we tell ourselves about city dwellers, about the relationships between individuals and the urban spaces they occupy, the past and the present, the built environment and power, responsibility and change, and about what it means to resist the apparently inevitable.” (Tange, 2015:11). What Tange argues about is that the stories we tell about cities shape what we conceive is possible or impossible for that city. The narratives we create, show what our priorities are (Tange, 2015). Even though in his introduction he is presenting literature (journalist, memoir, fiction, drama and so on), his words fit well with the urban policies and strategies.

Social sciences and political sciences, in particular, experienced a discourse turn, a moment of introducing notions from literature studies into the field and revising it. During the 90s, such post-positivists works established the relationship between narratives and the way we construct the reality and experience it (Honeck, 2018). Narratives are “the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically goal-directed processes” (Polkinghorne, 1995:5). Such stories have the power to affect the political world by shaping the collective understanding of specific topics (Honeck, 2018).

3.2. Planning as Imagineering.

Planning is ultimately constructing a narrative. Plans are imagineerings, able to influence reality by producing a narrative, visual or text, on what is the city and what should it be. I am using the term as Suitner uses it - “imaginary is a political tool; a constructed, objectified common interest; a simplified narrative of a symbolic urban vision that “keeps things going” in an urban world that would otherwise be too complex to handle (Jessop, 2004, 2008; Jessop & Oosterlynck, 2008)” (Suitner, 2015:9). In his book “Imagineering Cultural Vienna”, Suitner (2015) traces how narratives about urban cultural development shape concrete projects in the city. He is arguing that the city is not only the materiality of the buildings and infrastructure but a discursive process in which the public discourse is producing the city (Suitner, 2015:40). The new modes of planning the city were increasingly more open to participation and debate. The top-

down approach of decision-making lost its legitimacy and active groups – civil society and business demanded more communicative planning (Suitner, 2015). As mentioned already at the beginning of the text, such restructuring of power often created new, or deepened old social and economic inequalities. Who, how and in what way is part of the negotiation of the urban planning is not a stable given. It is important to trace the role of the stakeholders, the narratives they use and the impact they have.

Strategic urban planning, whether short-term or long-term, is a new way to plan and govern cities towards a desirable end. Strategies for green, smart and competitive cities could be found all around the European Union, and in many places around the world. Some strategies are based on sectors – economy, tourism, culture, some are an overview of the contemporary city and the imagined future city. In different countries, the strategies are mixed with more traditional planning documents such as land-use, zoning, and others. Their impact and importance depend on the local legislation, budgeting, institutional setting and many more.

Concluding this segment we can say that the discourse of the main actors and institutions in the strategic planning imagines the city in a certain way and engineers the mechanisms for reaching the desirable future. In the process of imagining the possible future, and in the process of selecting the effective mechanisms, cities learn and look at each other. Aims and objectives in strategies around the world sound similar, planning experts travel long distances to work on plans in various cities and countries. The flow of ideas and knowledge is essential in urban planning.

4. On Traveling Ideas And Urban Policy Mobility.

“Wherever and whenever elites and activists have been concerned about the qualities of their cities and territories, they have looked about for ideas to help inspire their development programmes”- (Healey and Upton, 2010:1)

The scope of this master thesis is the strategic urban planning. It is defined as a planning tool concerned with the development of the city, for a certain time period, and based on

a territorial principle. Policy transfer or policy mobility is defined “as a process by which ‘knowledge about how policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting’”(quoted in Stone, 2012:483). Urban policies could travel in time, as well as in space. Traveling ideas are used in the sense of “soft’ forms of transfer _ such as the spread of norms, standard setting and development of professional communities or networks (Ladi 2011) _ as a complement to the hard transfer of policy tools, structures and practices.” (Stone, 2012:484). In general I will look at the strategic documents of Sofia and I will search in them (and in the process of creating this documents) the references towards urban policies of foreign cities, or countries.

Usually, the urban strategies are overarching – “green”, “smart”, “competitive” ideas that have to restructure the efforts of the city (and its budget) for the future development. Strategies (1) identify problems (based on concrete data), (2) envision future variations of development, (3) set goals and (4) develop concrete tasks for reaching the goals (and set additional mechanisms for tracking the progress of implementation). They are one of the urban planning tools, trying to encompass the variety of activities and phenomena in the city, and to involve the variety of urban actors (political, experts, civil society), to work together for the same goals. Strategies are individual work of each city. However, similar trends are popping in different parts of the world - buzzwords and popular concepts are traveling from place to place. Being a livable city, or a green city, or a smart city is on the agenda of many places all around the world.

Examples of cities with such strategies from the recent years are Vienna (Smart Vienna - 2050), Boston (Imagine Boston), and Copenhagen, Helsinki, Barcelona and so on. The idea of using strategies as the main tool in urban planning is a traveling idea of its own. However, the content of the plans and the following urban interventions are a subject of mobility as well. The next paragraphs look at the idea of urban policy mobility, the ways it is happening and the reasons behind it.

Ideas traveling from one place to another, from one village to another, from one country to another, from one part of the globe to another is not a new phenomenon.

Globalization could have intensified the process, but have not invented it. People have always traveled and shared their ideas, knowledge, worldviews, and beliefs (Healey and Upton, 2010). Healey and Upton claim such diffusion was happening according to the imperial and colonial expansions in the 19th and 20th century. However, nowadays Asia and Latin America are challenging the the dominance of the hegemony of Western traditions in planning thought and practice” (Healey and Upton, 2010:...). In literature topics such as: policy mobility, institutional transfer, imitation, and lesson-drawing have been popular objects contemporary research (Mukhtarov, 2014). What travels, to where, why, in what way and by who is it driven, are some of the questions frequently asked (Mukhtarov, 2014).

More recently in urban policy mobility literature, questions of power relations and narratives, legitimizing certain “truths” in urban development are a key research topic. For example, the work of Sara Gonzales (2006) on Bilbao shows the ways “scalar narratives” are shaping the urban strategies of the city in the past decades. The idea of competition between cities on a global scale pushes towards local answers that are “undebatable”. Referring to narratives of rescaling gives the legitimization for policymakers to carry on controversial projects (Gonzales, 2006). Furthermore, the experience of Bilbao takes on its own life, becoming an example to other post-industrial cities, looking for answers to their own problems. The “Bilbao effect” became a solidified narrative, used in media, academia, and politics to refer to a successful story, emptied of its multifaced context.

4.1. How They Travel

Cook (2008) overtakes a detailed study of the policy transfer of Business Improvement Districts from the USA to England and Wales. In his work, he argues that the ways policy is designed to be “successful and applicable” are of huge importance. The Business Improvement Districts did not originate in the USA, but in Canada, and traveled to countries around the world, including Serbia, Germany, New Zealand and South Africa. However, when the policymakers in England turned to the idea as a solution to a problem of providing services in their city centers, they praised the American experience, using it as an argument for the implementation of a similar scheme. For Cook, several aspects should be taken into account: it starts with the identification of a local problem (similar to what happened in Bilbao with the politics of scale). Later: how

the foreign model is constructed to be successful and appropriate. This is a very important aspect of a policy being selected, stripped away from its local context, described as a success and argued to be the “perfect” solution to the local problem. On this point the local actors, individuals or institutions and their ties abroad are crucial. One of the reasons for England to look only in American experience with BIDs was the connection between the leading organization in England (the Association of Town Centre Management) and the American Association of BIDs – International Downtown Association. Thus the existing professional networks and connections play a main role in the path-dependency of the policy travel.

After these two processes, comes the process of translation or re-embedding of the policy in the new context. This process is also highly selective, and the end result of the translation could not have much in common with the concrete policy in translation. In the case of England and BIDs, Cook shows how the English legal and political context ends up with a scheme that is only inspired by the American experience. And at the end, the local pilot policies are also selectively described to be seen as successes.

The effectiveness of the policy mobility relies on concrete often used practices. Some of them are the study or policy tours and international conferences presentations. Study tours for experts, or visiting tours for policymakers ease the process of accepting the narrative of the “best practice” and the “success story”. Furthermore, the meeting between individuals or organizations could lead to strong ties, exchanging experience and beliefs for urban issues and solutions.

4.2 Why They Travel

Cook also pays attention to the usage of the best practices as a legitimization tool. There is no need for political debate about the results of such policy because it has already proven to be successful in another place. Thomas Honeck writes about the same usage of narratives in urban policy mobility. Drawing on the vast post-positivist literature on narratives in policy research, Honeck makes a link between the post-truth: “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Oxford Dictionary, 2016) and the ways “best practices” are circulating the world. Stories of success are curated by

consultants, gurus, and critics in urban planning and urban politics. Cities could become a role model or a leader in a certain policy. Cook gives an example with Porto Alegre and the participatory budgeting. The policy in motion, however, created imitations, and even parodies of the original (Honeck, 2018). In his work, in two German cities Berlin and Stuttgart, he shows the importance of the actors involved in the policy transfer.

Eastern European countries, going through institutional, social, economic and political changes after 1989, have been keen on adopting western European policies. As one author notes “[i]solation is impossible in the contemporary world, and policy transfer has become a fact of everyday life in various countries... post-communist countries have been especially willing to emulate the West.” (Randma-Liiv, 2005: 472 in Stead, Jong, and Reinholde, 2009:2). After the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007, the multilevel governance and the effects of policy transferring and translation has become even more interesting.

European legislation and its adoption by member states is only one level on which the ideas have been translated. Higher mobility of the local experts, administration members, and policy-makers are another way in which policies have been presented and understood. Writings on the process could also be found in the field of urban planning (see: Stead, Jong, and Reinholde, 2009). Still, the debate on policy transfer from the West to the East is described in a very developmentalist approach. The rationale behind the process is usually regarding the lesser-developed local authorities of the East, not having the know-how and the resources to deal with recent problems, turning to the better-developed West countries to find quick and easy solutions. The narrative fits the narrative of “catching-up” with the West. Even though many of the observations on lack of resources and lack of know-how are objective, the rationale “catching-up” with the West explanatory system, misses out many elements in the translation of Western practices in the East. The policy translation often hides the complex motives of the involved actors as well as different legislation, institutions, and cultural understandings. Furthermore, the idea of the West as an undeniable role model is a social and geographical construct that uses a vast palette of symbols, imaginaries, and discourses to re-establish its superiority. Europeanization as a concept gained much popularity in the past decades. As Featherstone (2003:3) notes “[m]inimally, “Europeanization”

involves a response to the policies of the European Union (EU)". On the other part of the spectrum: "[i]n a maximalist sense, the structural change that it entails must fundamentally be of a phenomenon exhibiting similar attributes to those that predominate in, or are closely identified with, 'Europe'." (Featherstone, 2003:3). What that means for the urban planning of a member state of the EU is debatable. From one side all members of the Union sign directives and agreements that have direct or indirect consequences and manifestation in the local urban plans. In this sense, the urban agenda of the Union is a response to the common policy of the Union. At the same time, the idea of 'Europe', the constructed identity of 'a European' city is crucial for some local authorities. As Featherstone (2003) notes, Europeanization is an irregular and uneven process; it does not occur homogeneously over time and space. In the case of post-socialist urban planning and how traveling ideas influence it, Europeanization offers necessary input. The domestic adaptation of EU laws and directives could be seen as a type of traveling. However, what was more important for me in the case study was the more open and broad definition of Europeanization – voluntary urban policy mobility, based on the idea of identity or belonging to 'Europe'.

Which ideas and in what way will be translated is a complex process, based not only on presupposed trajectory. Stead Jong and Reinholde (2009) make a good comparative study between Wroclaw and Riga, and how each city adopted German-inspired transport policies. They describe the policy transfer as a very selective process in which short-term, visible solutions were preferred instead of institutional changes. They emphasize how important are the actors involved and the "window of opportunity" (the specific time the policies were implemented). Another remark they make is about the benefits of the so-called "study trips" to German cities (the places the policy is originating) and to other Eastern post-socialist cities – to motivate and convince the local administration that change is possible, even in context with fewer resources.

In sum, the traveling of an idea in urban policies is a highly selective piece of work, dependent on the set of actors involved, on structural path-dependencies and almost always ends as an autonomous translation. It is carefully constructed and does not reflect the multifaced reality. And it is often used as a political argument and legitimization tool.

5. The Importance of Geographic Imaginaries.

Urban policy mobility has geographic dimensions. The geographic imaginaries of the actors involved in the process of travel have their geographic imaginaries about the best urban practices and role models. For example, the Europeanization, in a maximalist sense, depends on the imaginary about Europe. What falls into this category 'Europe,' and where are its boundaries are constantly negotiated, constructed and reconstructed.

In human geography, it is accepted that geography is not only mathematical coordinates but also the idea of geography. A place is not only the physicality of its existence but also the content of its identity and the relations it has with other places. We cannot but think about the work of Doreen Massey (1994), arguing that a place is constantly constructed from the links people have with another place. Sheppard (2002) uses the term positionality to define the relational aspect of geography. Sheppard argues that places are connected through space not only through distance and relative location (2002). He introduces the notion of positionality, drawing from a feminist theory – “the conditions of possibility for an agent depend on her or his position with respect to others” (Sheppard, 2002:12). Positionality involves power relations and is continuity enacted in an attempt to reproduce or challenge it (Sheppard, 2002).

The geographic imaginary thus is a “geography that overlaps more tangible geography and helps shape our attitude to people and places” (Howie and Lewis, 2014:133). It is the representation of the world that frames our relationship with it.

In the selection of urban policy as worthy of traveling, such geographic imaginaries have their role as well. In the case of Eastern Europe or the post-socialist countries, the Western capitalist world presents itself as further “in the future”, creating a mutation of time-space imaginary. The “Western” world is the future. It is thus easy to conclude that problems of the past are already dealt with in the future. Thus the Eastern bloc looks for easy, fast answers to urban issues in the West. It is a double construction of a role model – the developed world.

In my research of Sofia I was tracing the exact places that were referenced and the connotation they had such as – “European”, “Western”, “developed”, “the future”. The link between what are the geographic imaginaries at play and where do policies travel from is a central question. Sometimes the argument about why a certain policy is desirable could be only the geographic coordinates it comes from, because of this additional value people have about geography. The opposite is as valid – examples for urban issues are not searched in places that are seen as too different, irrelevant or undesirable.

In her paper “Why not a world city?”, Koch (2013) traces how nation-building concerns are shaping the city Astana: “I argue that state- and nation-building concerns in the era of independence have prevailed over interests in engaging the free market and liberalist narratives that accompany the world cities discourse.” (Koch,2013:109). She shows how connections based on different geography – that of the history of the nation, are more powerful than the ones based on global and world cities success stories.

Even in a globalized world, where information could reach from anywhere to everyone, the truth is that place matters, the prejudice, and stereotypes we have as societies are navigating us in decision-making processes.

METHODOLOGY

1. Comparative (Through Elsewhere) And Interdisciplinary.

In the following section, I will discuss the methodology of the research I want to overtake in order to investigate the travel of ideas in strategic urban planning in a post-socialist city. The overall approach I will fulfill in composing my master thesis is a qualitative case study with comparative elements. It is guided by my research questions and the state of the art that I discussed in the previous chapters. It will also follow a more open interdisciplinary approach, combining literature from different fields as shown in the literature review. An integral part of the study is the examination of literature, linking theories from fields such as geography, political science, urban planning, post-socialist theory and urban policy mobility. Looking at a case with the set of various concepts helps shape and distinguishes between the context and the particular, and the links between scales and actors. However, trying to “translate” theory from slightly different academic fields is a challenge on its own, and the capacity of a master thesis only alludes to its complete resolution.

The nature of this research is a comparative gesture of thinking the cities through elsewhere (Robinson, 2015). In her article from 2015, Jennifer Robinson articulates a new perspective on comparative urban studies. She is arguing that any urban form or phenomena could be the starting point for a comparison. Furthermore, by having an urban case (a city, a phenomenon in the city, etc.) and juxtaposing it to notions, concepts, developed elsewhere, we are already comparing (Robinson,2015). The minimal comparing gesture will be the one of “broad practice of thinking cities/the urban through elsewhere (another case, a wider context, existing theoretical imaginations derived from other contexts, connections to other places), in order to better understand outcomes and to contribute to broader conceptualizations and conversations about (aspects of) the urban.” (Robinson,2015:5). I understand the notion of “elsewhere” as, from one side the attempt to bring closer the interdisciplinary literature, and from another side as the constant flow of connections and references in a world of cities. Thus the concept of elsewhere fits with the urban policy mobility – cities know, or have access to information about what other cities are enforcing as solutions to urban problems. Local authorities, experts, and professionals, as well as NGOs and

citizens all, take part in the creation of a collage of traveling ideas. Furthermore, urban models tend to circulate and spread in different contexts.

The research is a case study. Following Flyvbjerg (2006) and Lund (2014), a single case could contribute to the scientific development and resonate with elements, dynamics, and relations from the field. The data will be collected for one city, but it will constantly be referred to the broader urban theoretical framework and global urban phenomena. It is what Bodnar calls “implicitly comparative or quasi-comparative method” (Bodnar, 2001:8). Her qualitative analyze of Budapest (2001), as well as Sonia Hirt’s book on Sofia (2012), will serve as examples for such work – based on a specific city, they tell a globally relevant story and enrich the empirical and theoretical work on their subjects.

Planning culture and history, both are of crucial importance for the in-depth analysis. In order to scale-up my study case investigation, I looked at literature reviewing the case of Sofia, as well as other post-socialist and even non-post-socialist cities. The attempt was to build on a conversation between these different experiences and link them to the contemporary situation. Connecting the case to the theory, I was identifying the socialist and the post-socialist elements, as well as the traveling of urban policies in planning in the recent decades.

2. Selection Of Case Study.

The case was chosen from the beginning of my work. In a way, the case and the literature were informing each other in a hermeneutical manner – from the particular to the abstract and from the abstract back to the particular. My interest in the issue of strategic planning, and envisioning the city, was sparked by the planning initiative “Vision for Sofia – 2050”. The literature on urban planning, urban governance, and post-socialist city shaped the conceptual lenses through which I started observing the case. Later the field led me to the topic of urban policy mobility, which on its part required a new set of literature. Thus the work on the case study was a dialogue between the theory and the case.

Sofia is my hometown. The deeper knowledge about the place, the local history, and language, give me a good basis for a deeper understanding of the processes happening in

the city. However, this thesis aims to capture an urban problem, valid in wider urban realities. Through the literature review, I've tried to scale up the work, beyond the experience of Sofia. Furthermore, in mapping the cities and places, which influence Sofia, I try to show how cities are connected to the world of cities.

The case is the current strategic urban planning in Sofia. The main object of my research is the currently active strategies of the city (which are three strategic documents) and the ongoing planning initiatives of the city (again three of them). The focus is on the content of the strategic documents, the urban actors engaged in them and the links with traveling urban models or policies from elsewhere. Sofia is my city – it is where I was born, and where I grew up. I recognize that the requirement for a transnational element for this master thesis is not fulfilled. However, I do believe an in-depth knowledge about a specific place could bring more depth in my work and lead to better research, relevant beyond the Sofian context.

3. Analytical Approach.

Throughout the fieldwork, I worked with two main analytical approaches: the conceptual frame of actor-centered institutionalism, and the discourse analysis. I developed an informative map of actors that will be vital in the analysis of the discourse. The aim is to identify which actors involve examples from elsewhere, in what manner and to what end in the strategic planning of the city. "The basic assumption underlying actor-centered institutionalism is that an analysis of structures without reference to actors is as handicapped as an analysis of actor's behavior without reference to structures (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995: 46)." (van Lieshout, 2008:2).

The discourse analysis was concerned with circulating ideas about "green", "smart", "livable" and "competitive" cities. The idea was to try and trace the urban model Sofia is setting for its future. Another discourse was applied concerning the geographic imaginaries – ideas about desirable and undesirable places and urban policies. The underlying assumption is that the urban plans are narratives that create the reality of the city. These narratives are a subject of analysis, through coding and interpretation.

4. Methods.

Several methods were used to collect the necessary data:

- *Observations.*

I used observations as a preliminary source, gathering information about current and recent planning initiatives in Sofia. Furthermore, observations were extremely helpful to understand the way urban planners work, the relationships between different teams and units, and to identify key actors in the urban strategic planning of the city. This information elaborated the map of actors (part of the actor-centered institutionalism research approach).

- *Mapping actors.*

Actors were mapped based on their involvement in strategic planning, the relationship with the rest of the actors and the category they belong to political, administrative, NGO, business or expert. As noted earlier – who is planning, what power they hold and in what relationship they are, affect the urban policies. The produced constellation of actors gave me information about the ways and reasons Sofia is connected to other cities – through institutions, and through individual actors.

- *Document analysis of strategies.*

Three strategies were included in the document analysis: “Regional Strategy for development Sofia 2014-2020”; “Integrated plan for urban regeneration and development of Sofia city 2014-2020” and “Sofia- city for People”. I analyzed the strategies as narratives, as texts, subject to the discourse analysis. The documents gave me the information about the urban model that Sofia is aiming to achieve.

The three strategies in question were analyzed using a coding system of four urban models:

1. **Green city:** a cod, referring to policies connected with environmental protection, sustainable usage of resources. Key concepts coded as green were: sustainable development, environmental preservation, green city, environmental equity.
2. **Smart city:** a cod, referring to the economic and technological development of the city. Key concepts coded as smart were: innovative, intelligent, knowledge-based, smart.
3. **Competitive:** a code, referring to a market-oriented, neoliberal urban development. Key concepts coded as competitive were: competitive, attractive for business, new service-based economy, global, and various phrases positioning the city in the future global and European market.
4. **Livable:** a code, referring to urban planning and design based on the higher standard of living. Key concepts coded as livable were: city for people, city of people, balanced, livable, attractive for residents, cultural, with a strong identity, walkable, social equity.

- *Interviews with key actors.*

The interviews were made in the period beginning of June – mid-July 2019. They were semi-structured, and each respondent had a variation of the same questions, tailored according to their position and role in the strategic planning of the city. Doing interviews with experts and elite is never an easy task. Before each interview, I had prepared an interview guide, which allows for new information to come from the respondent, but is covering all necessary questions on the strategic urban planning in Sofia and its connections to elsewhere. The interviews were conducted in Bulgarian. The data from the interviews was used to answer the main question of how and to what extend traveling ideas are part of the strategic planning of Sofia.

- *Mapping “the elsewhere”.*

Another mapping method I applied is mapping all references of cities and countries mentioned by my respondents during the interviews. The categories I arrange them are best/worst examples, personal experience (work/live), city partners, or neutral references. The maps are after juxtaposed to each other, showing the similarities and

differences of the geographic imaginaries the different actors have. The maps as well show from where, and which cities are the most influential for the strategic planning in Sofia. The discourse analysis of the interviews compliments the “picture” of the map of cities by elaborating on the why question. These method helped me better answer the question of similarities and differences of the geographic imaginaries of each of the actors.

5. Fieldwork.

My observations started with the beginning of “Vision for Sofia 2050” (referred to in the text as the Vision) – December 2016. At the end of 2016, the city announced the intentions to create a shared vision, a participatory, open process for the future development and identity of the city. The recently entered office, Chief Architect – Zdravkov, gathered a team to work on the methodology for creating the Vision, the Municipal Council accepted it, and the work began starting the new year – 2017. The process opened up towards broader public around October of the same year. Since then I’ve been observing their work closely, and I’ve been researching the planning culture in Bulgaria.

My fieldwork officially started in June 2018, moving back to Sofia. I come in touch with the team from “Vision for Sofia 2050,” and I started mapping the main actors in the strategic planning in the city. Two more strategies are being developed now – “Sofia – city for people” and “Green Sofia”. The first is developed based on a report in collaboration with Gehl Architects. The second is an initiative closely linked with the European Union initiative “Green capital of Europe”. The first signs of a clear influence of traveling ideas were easy to make. The assumption that the city is reinventing its narratives based on mobile urban policies is easy to make. However, both of them are voluntary, non-committable tasks of the municipality. Only the Vision has the ambition to be the main planning document in the upcoming decades, which will guide the city general urban plan. Further, my field included two more strategies: “Regional strategy for the development of Sofia 2014-2020” and the “Integrated plan for urban regeneration and development of Sofia 2014-2020”. Both are the currently active strategies of the city.

Strategic documents analyzed in the fieldwork:

1. “Regional strategy for the development of Sofia 2014-2020”. The plan developed as part of the programming period of the European Union. Ordered by the municipality, created by expert planners and researchers. Includes the metropolitan area of the city.
2. “Integrated plan for urban regeneration and development of Sofia 2014-2020”. Plan developed with the regional strategy. Ordered by the municipality, created by expert planners and researchers. Includes the metropolitan area of the city, with emphasis on 3 territories.
3. “Sofia – city for people”. A strategy developed in collaboration between the Chief Architect of Sofia, a private planning company, and Gehl Architects. Based on the Gehl principals of livable and attractive public space. Includes the city center.

Strategic planning processes observed in the fieldwork:

1. “Vision for Sofia 2050” – ongoing planning initiative. The Municipality ordered the creation of the Vision. A municipal planning company is developing it in a more participatory approach. The work on the Vision is delayed with more than half a year. My original expectations were that I would be able to read the draft of the strategy. That was not possible; however, I was able to observe three of their public discussions and to take interviews with two team members. The Vision should be the supreme planning document of the city in the next decades and should serve as the base for the creation of new general structural plan (zoning plan) of the city.
2. “Green Sofia” – ongoing planning initiative. The strategy is part of the candidacy of the city for Green capital of Europe. It started as a bottom-up initiative, endorsed by the mayor and carried out by a municipal foundation.
3. Strategic plan for sustainable mobility Sofia – a municipal task, executed by experts, with the aim of developing a sustainable mobility plan of the city.

I gathered 8 interviews during the fieldwork. The respondents were key actors in the current strategic planning of the city. Respondents:

1. M. Gerasimova, coordinator of two topics in the Vision (out of 7) – “People” and “Culture and Identity.” 13.06.2018, a café next to her office.
2. L. Georgiev – main coordinator of the Vision and head of the municipal urban planning enterprise “Sofproekt.” 26.06.2018, the office of Sofproekt.
3. E. Panayotova – coordinator of Sofia-Green capital. 27.06.2018, the office of Sofia-Green capital.
4. S. Chakarova – copartner of Placemake – urban planning private company, developing in partnership with the Municipality and Gehl Architects “Sofia – city for People.” 02.07.2018, the café “Architect’s Club”.
5. M. Edreva – chairwoman of GRRB (leading party) in the Municipal Council, head of Department of Culture. 29.06.2018, her office in the main building of the municipality.
6. Z. Zdravkov – Chief Architect of Sofia. 11.07.2018, his office.
7. Prof. Troeva – head of Center for National Territorial planning and the founder of Urban Planning University subject. Author of “Regional strategy for development of Sofia, 2014-2020” and the “Integrated plan for urban regeneration and development of Sofia, 2014-2020”. 29.06.2018, her office in the National Center for Territorial Planning.
8. B. Bonev and A. Zografski – foundation members of the NGO “Save Sofia.” 01.07.2018, the open garden behind the king’s palace (currently National Gallery).

The respondents were identified at the beginning of the field work in June, as the leading stakeholders in the strategic planning in the city. To have a more diverse story, they are respectfully representatives from the municipality, experts, and non-governmental sector. The topic of the interviews was the use of traveling ideas, the foreign contacts, and partners that put Sofia in relations with the world of cities: professional experience abroad, participation in networks, direct contact with representatives from other cities, the study of best-practices and so on.

I gathered the interviews in the period beginning of June – mid-July 2019. The interviews last between 45-60min except two – the shortest one 25min with the Chief Architect and the longest 90min with “Save Sofia.” The later was an exception, as the respondents were two and the conversation with them took double the time. The interview with the Chief Architect was planned as a shorter one, as I was expecting to have little time to talk to him, due to his busy schedule. Nonetheless, he fully answered the questionnaire.

Additionally, the field research includes close observation of 2 public debates and discussions, part of the participatory methods of the Vision.

6. Limitations.

Limitations of the methodological approach are mostly linked to the unpredictability of the field in a case study.

Time. The research could have benefited from more time, as the planning initiatives in question are still unfolding and more connections with cities abroad could have presented themselves. Another limitation of the time is the period of the investigation – June, and July. Summer months in Sofia are usually considered inactive – institutions and closing doors for the summer holidays, public hearings are few, most of the people travel outside of the city.

Delay. Initially, I was expecting a stronger role of “Vision for Sofia” as the main object of my research. According to their timetable during the summer of 2018, they had to be on the finishing line of their project – presenting the draft of the strategy on public hearings and neighborhood meetings. The project got delayed with more than half a year. Thus I was not able to read the draft of the document.

MAIN FINDINGS

1. Historical Review of Urban Planning In Sofia.

I will start the chapter with a short introduction to the city of Sofia and a summary of my findings from the historical review of the urban planning of Sofia. Sofia is the capital of Bulgaria, with a population of 1,2 million people, and a metropolitan area including 30 villages and 4 cities.

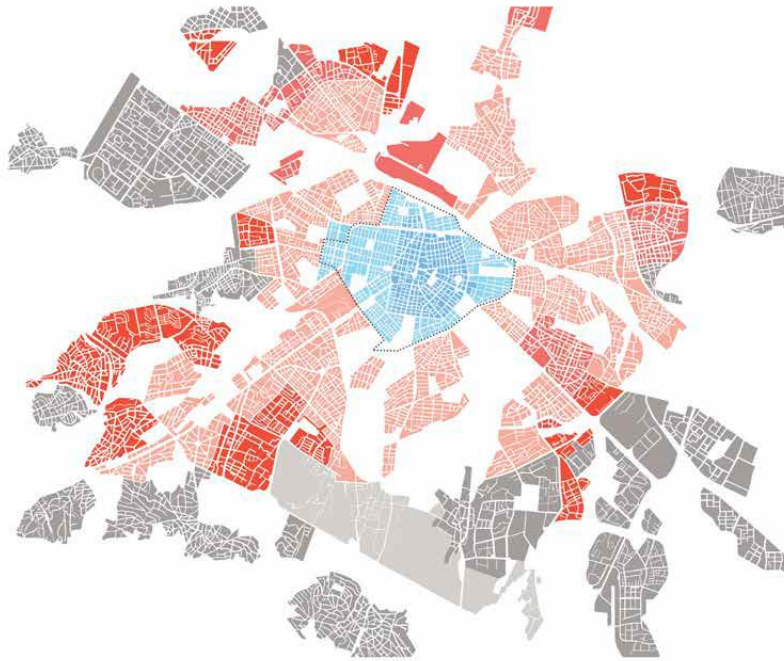


Figure 1. Map of Sofia, history of development, source: Sofia-city for people, Gehl Architects.

On the map we see the urban development of the city throughout the years: the blue center was created mainly in the late 19th and early 20th century, with the exception of the presence of remains from the Roman empire; the light pink is the city that developed until 1937; the darker red – during the 50s and 60s of the last century and finally the grey – from the 80s onwards. Parts of the white spots represent gardens and parks in the city. South of the city is situated the mountain Vitosha, a national park and part of the metropolitan area of Sofia. Historically the socio-economic division of the city has been the more privileged South-East and the more deprived North-West. However, the statistical data about the city is rarely collected with georeferencing, thus making it difficult to visualize and analyze the polarization and segregation of the city. The topic of the data collection and data analysis of the part of the city will be a reoccurring topic in

my field research. While discussing the usage of traveling ideas and examples from abroad, I will come back to the availability of data about the city.

1.1. Post-Socialist Strategic Planning.

The first urban plan of the city dates from the end of 19th century (1879), just after the country gained independence from the Ottoman Empire and Sofia was chosen as the capital. The beginning of the urban planning was characterized with invited foreign experts, mostly from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, architects, and engineers, which worked to transform the small, ottoman town in “European capital” (Nikiforov and Nikiforova, 2016). The desire of appearing and belonging to the geographic imaginary of Europe is not a new, post-socialist phenomenon, rather a historically embedded discourse of almost two centuries. The first urban plans for the city did not manage to predict the pace of the migration to the city. After the Second World War, Bulgaria became a communist state, ruled by one party. Although it was not a republic of USSR, its ties with Moscow were very strong. During this totalitarian regime, the power in the country was highly centralized, and most of the land in the country was nationalized. The planning in the country was done on a top national level and executed in each of the countries 28th regions. Sofia, as the capital, became the symbol of the success of the communists.

After 1989, during the 90s, the country experienced economic and political crises. The city, as other post-socialist cities have a high percentage of private property – 96% by 2001 (Hirt and Stoilov, 2007). That percentage was high even during socialism (80%, Hirt and Stoilov, 2007), but after 1989 a wave of privatization changed the face of the city. Planning became infrequent and uncommon. In the first decade after the transition to open-market democracy, Sofia had no new master plans or strategies. That was a sharp discontinuity from the socialist planning practice. During socialism, plans were developed every 5 years: a committee of experts will develop the state agenda for the next 5 years, after which each region and municipality will comply with the decisions and integrate them in their own master plan. Suddenly after 1989 the master plans, as a symbol of high state control, were replaced with a partial modification of the already existing zoning plan. Planning as a holistic, integrated, and coordinated practice was neglected.

Next step in the history of the urban planning was in the early 2000, when a process for entering the European Union began. As part of the requirements for entering in the European Union, Bulgaria had to restructure a lot of its institutions and administration. The country reterritorized - new 6 regions were established. Region plans, Municipal plans, and strategies were needed in order to implement European legislation and to start the process of European integration. In Sofia, the work on the first urban strategy started in the year 2000, with the help of the European Union experts and the World Bank (Tsenkova, 2007). The strategy led to a new “general structure plan”, accepted in 2009. The general structural plan is a zoning plan for the territory of the city, which is the supreme tool of the municipality for control over the urban development. After the acceptance of Bulgaria in the European Union, the municipalities had developed strategies for each programming period of seven years: 2007-2013 and 2014-2020. For the second programming period, 2014-2020 Sofia city produced a “Strategy for development” and an “Integrated plan for urban regeneration and development”. I will look at both of the documents in detail in the next chapter.

The continuity of the post-socialist urban planning could be observed in the planning process – highly closed, developed by experts and presented before the political elite. The continuity is slowly breaking, as more stakeholders are being invited to the planning table.

Concerning the strategic planning, it is not embedded in the planning legislation (Tsenkova, 2007) but it is seen as a way to provide ways to deal with the new urban problems. According to Tsenkova (2007) post-socialist cities have limited experience in strategic planning and no model to follow. The laissez-fair approach that most local authorities have adopted towards planning deepens the uneven urban development (Tsenkova, 2007). She argues that the strategic planning could offer a way to try and guide the future urban development in the new market-oriented urban reality.

Tsenkova notes, one thing in common is that the strategies of Riga, St. Petersburg, Vilnius, Sofia, Budapest and Prague all “demonstrate a strong emphasis on competitiveness, economic growth and prosperity, and efforts to enhance the quality of life through improvement of infrastructure, housing, transport, and education”.

(Tsenkova, 2007:460). One thing that perhaps is vital for the success of such strategy is the: “[m]utual trust, inclusiveness, and partnership ..., but they take a long time to develop and nurture.” (Tsenkova, 2007:468)

1.2. Moment Of Change.

One more particularity in the urban planning of the city should be mentioned – the figure of the Chief Architect. The Chief Architect was created in the 50s, and each settlement of the country had an appointed expert (usually an architect or engineer) in charge of all issues of urban development (Nikiforov and Nikiforova, 2016). After 1989, the institution of the Chief Architect did not change. As he/she is responsible for construction permits and the corrections of the general and the detailed zoning plans, he/she became a key factor in the city, as important as the mayor. The Chief Architect is not a political position; however, it is highly politicized, as he/she is appointed directly by the mayor. From 2006 to 2016 the position of the Chief Architect in Sofia had not changed. Politically, the city has been ruled by the same party since 2005 – GERB, and since 2009 has the same mayor – Fandakova (the first woman to hold the position). GERB is also the party that holds the majority of the state government. The nowadays prime minister was the mayor of the capital between 2005 and 2009, after which he gained the political power over the country. The close link between the national state government and the local city government is of huge importance. The success of Sofia is being presented as a success for the whole country, which could be clearly seen in the practice of cutting ribbons on inaugurations of important sights in the city, in the presence of the mayor and the prime minister. The stable political arrangement of the city does not suppose that a change in the local government had occurred in the past years. However, the resignation of the previous Chief Architect and the competition for new one created space for change.

In 2015, when the previous Chief Architect announced that he is stepping down from the position, a wave of discussions raised questions about what the role of the Chief Architect should be, how and who should be engaged in the urban planning. The event of choosing the new Chief Architect – Zdravkov, was identified by respondents as a point of change. The new architect had a new vision for the capital city. The municipality ordered him to develop that new vision into a long-term strategy. However, he had another idea – to start an open, participatory process for the creation for “Vision for Sofia 2050”.

Simultaneously he invited Gehl Architects, and with a local partnership they developed “Sofia- city for people”. Both of the strategies are part of my case study and will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

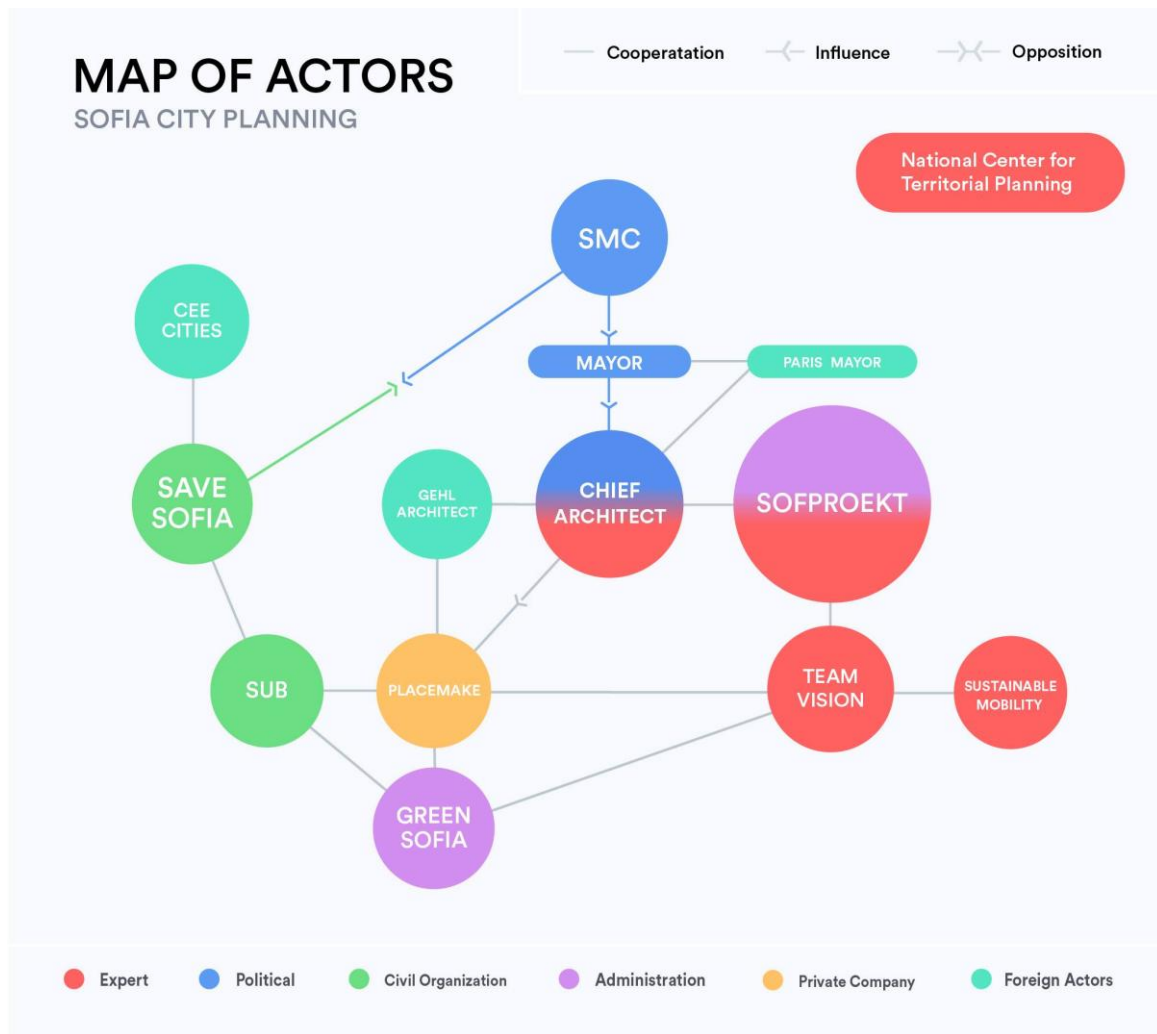
1.3. Conclusion.

The city has experienced a turbulent few decades. The urban planning – as well. The first clear change was during the 90s, when the control of the city administration over the urban development was scaled down, as much as possible. No master plans were developed, private property was announced as the main arbiter for decisions over where and what is happening in the city. However, the figure of the Chief Architect continued to exist. The second turn happened as the country joined the EU – strategic planning was introduced. The second has the clear influence of traveling ideas through the EU declarations and the role of the World Bank experts. The plans were created according to the standards, uphold by these two organizations. As part of my fieldwork, the third moment of change in the planning practice could be named – the resignation of the old and the appointment of the new Chief Architect. After the change in this important for the city position, new visions, strategies, and plans for the city started appearing. Architects and urban planners took part in reimagining the process of planning itself.

This context is important for interpreting the data, collected during my fieldwork. The moment of change occurs in all of the collected interviews.

2. Map Of Actors.

Based on the data, collected from observations and interviews, I developed a map of actors. Which actors are involved in the urban planning and what are the relationships between them is of crucial importance. Each of the actors has a certain set of obligations, and, of course, a personal (institutional) agenda in the urban planning.



This is a representation of the map of actors in the strategic planning of Sofia. In the center is the municipal planning company Sofproekt. They work in collaboration with the Chief Architect. Currently they are in charge of creating the Vision for Sofia 2050. The head of Sofproekt is also the main coordinator of the Vision – Lyubo Georgiev. He got the position in Sofproekt recently, with a project for the company restructure. After he took the position almost all staff members were replaced. The intentions of the new team of Sofproekt is to create a functioning system for regular urban planning and urban research. The Chief Architect Zdravkov, as mentioned, entered in position 2016 with the idea of transforming Sofia into a city for people. His candidacy was based on the ideas of Jan Gehl, the famous Danish architect. Furthermore after stepping in power, Zdravkov

invited Gehl Architects and worked with them on a report on public spaces in the city center of Sofia.

The Mayor and the Municipal Council (SMC), are the decision making, political actors, that should uphold a vision for the city. Their role in planning are indirect – the Mayor through his/hers political promises and the appointment of a Chief Architect, and the SMC – by voting on all new plans and strategies, entering the legislation of the city. For the past almost a decade the ruling party in the municipality as well as the mayor of Sofia, had been from the same party – GERB.

The Vision works with 3 other teams – Green Sofia, a team of experts, developing a strategy for sustainable urban mobility and Placemake –a private planning company working on “Sofia – city for people”. Two non-profit civil organizations are active in the planning of the city: SUB is the union of Bulgarian planners, they propose alternative solutions to urban problems, they give their professional opinion on urban decisions and furthermore their members are working on various projects, various instances. For example one of the founders of Placemake is also the chairwoman of SUB. Other members are working or had worked in the team of the Vision, and in Sofproekt.

Save Sofia is the only actor that stands aside and has a clear confrontational relationship with the municipality and the mayor. Save Sofia is using social pressure, petitions, media pressure, public hearings and other civil methods to control and change the way the city is performing on several topics – transport, clean air, preservation of cultural heritage, quality of repairs and constructions in the city. The NGO is not directly linked to the strategies, but is active in all activities of The Vision, trying to set their agenda for the urban development of the city.

Three main foreign actors were identified through the interviews. First are the company of Jan Gehl that worked together with the Chief Architect and the company Placemake in developing a report on public space in the city center and recommendations for turning the city into “city for people”. The Paris Mayor office was mentioned both from the respondent from the city council as well from the Chief Architect. The close dialogue

between them is a subject of doubt, as it is not confirmed from the side of Paris Mayor office. The last actor on the map “CEE cities” refers to broad personal connections the members of Save Sofia have in cities as Ljubljana, Prague, Budapest, Warsaw, and Krakow. What is missing from the map are the connections of Sofproekt and the Vision with experts and planners abroad. The ways in which these connections influence the planning in Sofia will be a subject of a following chapter.

3. City Of Many Strategies. The findings of the discourse analysis and the observations of strategic documents and strategic initiatives in Sofia.

My first observation on the strategic planning in Sofia is the accumulation of strategies in the recent years. Currently two strategies are active regulatory documents, both accepted for the European Union programming period until 2020. One more is struggling to find its position in the administration – “Sofia – city for people”, developed in collaboration with Gehl Architects. Two big urban strategies – “Vision for Sofia 2050” and “Green Sofia” are ongoing processes, and additionally a plan for sustainable mobility is being developed as well. From my interviews I found out that the teams of 4 of the strategies, being developed right now – “City for people,” “Green capital,” “Sustainable mobility” and the Vision are in constant contact, performing regular meetings in order to coordinate efforts and ideas. They exchange information and intentions and are achieving, even if it is only partially, a more holistic approach to city planning.

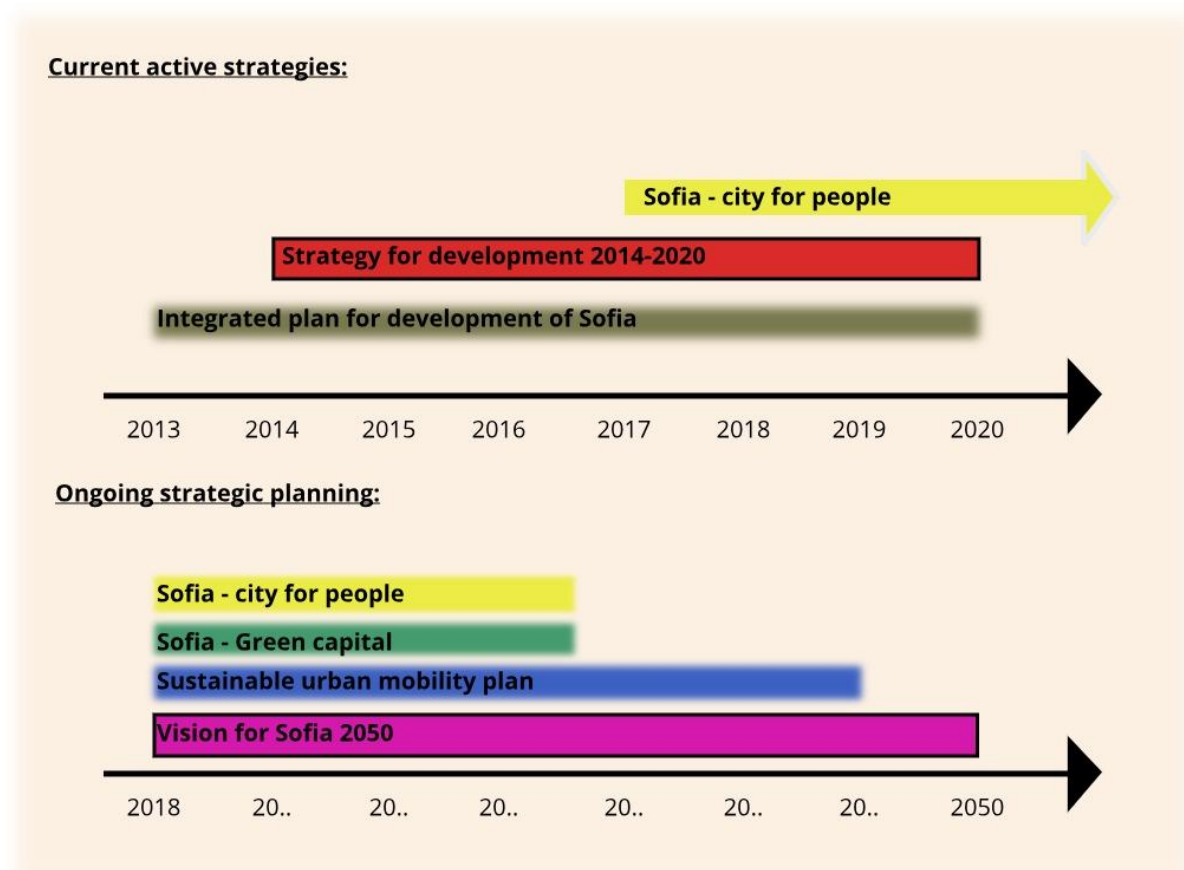


Figure 3. Visualization of current active strategic plans and planning initiatives in Sofia, 2018. Source: the author

3.1. Current Active Strategies.

In this chapter, I will present the main findings based on the already written strategies: the two municipal plans until 2020 and the document “Sofia-city for people”. After I will concentrate on the saturation of strategies, their purpose and the way they interact with each other.

As mentioned in the methodology section I applied 4 analytical codes in order to interpret the urban models, which are present in the strategic documents. The most focused was the strategy “Sofia-city for people”. The difference between it and the two other is staggering. The language on which they were developed, and the urban issues and solutions they present are quite different.

For beginning, the two strategies developed as a guideline for the period 2014-2020 are based on high expertise, data collected from various national and municipal

administrative bodies and in line with multilevel urban documents and legislation. They comply with the European strategy for 2020, with the national strategy – Bulgaria 2020 and with various urban documents such as the Leipzig charter and Toledo declaration. The documents include a SWAT analyze of the urban issues of Sofia and all the necessary work for the next seven years in a structured and prioritized matter. The report on “Sofia-city for people”, on the other side, was made after applying the Gehl research on public space, carried out by volunteer students from Sofia. The document itself does not introduce national or international policies and has no references towards previous strategies. The text is written in a highly accessible way, visually facilitated with pictures, visualization of possible solutions and illustrated layout. Additionally, the report and the recommendations are further advanced by stories and examples from other cities. The text is easily digestible and does not create a conflict of political opposition or otherwise.

Regarding which urban model is promoted by the strategies, the answer is not clear. “Sofia-city for people” is concerned with urban interventions for the amelioration of public space. The suggestions and solutions it gives are not bound in one or other urban policy. They all fall under the “Livable” urban model, promoting priority for walking and cycling, preservation of cultural heritage, strong urban identity build on views and unity in the urban design, maintaining a high standard of clean and attractive public space. Some of the recommendations in the document belong to the Green city model, arguing the benefits of green space and elements of wild nature in and around the city, mainly for recreational purposes. The report builds on ideas of social equity, but as it is characteristic for Gehl work, has little notions about critical topics based on concepts of race, ethnicity, religion, class or gender. Overall the messages of the strategy are scaled down, build on ideas of universal pleasant public space, beneficial for life and work.

The two strategies for the development of Sofia 2014-2020 offer a different perspective on the focus of the municipality. The regional strategy displays strong Competitive urban model characteristics. The main agenda for Sofia for the program period until 2020 is to develop a new economy, based on innovations and attractive business environment. In such way, the city will position itself in South-East Europe as a new and promising economy. The agenda should be met according to the European principles for

sustainable development and preservation of cultural heritage and local identity. In sum, the regional strategy bets on strong economic development, supported by the European funds and in line with the politics for convergence.

The “Integrated plan of Sofia” should support the regional strategy. However, the key vision of the strategy gives a slightly different urban model. The “Integrated plan” foresees on four main narratives for the city:

- Sofia for people: an inclusive city based on social equity and livability principles.
- Sofia – intelligent and creative city.
- Sofia – authentic and lively city.
- Sofia – green and attractive city.

The 4 Sofias are a mixture of all urban models, encompassing every possible direction for the development of the city. The plan offers three zones for intervention: one for social equity, North-West of the city, a region that receives little investment; one for the economic possibility, East from the city; one zone for cultural preservation - the city center. The strategy is executed with a high level of professionalism, based on vast amount of data and in consultation with a broader set of experts and stakeholders.

3.2. Current Strategic Initiatives Of The City.

Sofia shows itself as a city of strategies. With 3 active strategies, the city is developing 3 new – two encompassing the whole city, and one for the urban mobility.

In this section, I will present in short the current planning initiatives. At the end I conclude with the first analysis of the saturation of urban strategies in the post-socialist context.

1. The Vision for Sofia 2050.

The vision is a planning initiative, started in 2017 as a task of the new Chief Architect Zdravkov. He created a team of young professionals – architects, sociologists, planners

in charge of carried out the project. Two are the main principals in the creation of the Vision – participation and interdisciplinary work. The first is a new concept for the urban planning in Sofia. As mentioned in the literature review, the post-socialist and the public participation are conflicting concepts - one excludes the other. Nonetheless the team of the Vision is working hard on creating ways of including a broader set of stakeholders in the urban planning. Their work is divided into 7 topics (“People”, “Culture and Identity”, “Urban environment”, “Environment”, “Transport”, “Economy”, and “Governance”). Together the topics should encompass the city as a whole. Thus they introduce the idea of interdisciplinary as well. The Vision should have been the main focus of this research. However, currently, they are running more than half a year delay. Originally by this summer, a draft of the strategy had to be ready. Now the draft is expected the beginning of 2019. This is one of the unexpected events, which I stumbled upon during my research. Going around this obstacle, I gave more attention to the interviews with the Vision, and on the public events, they organized during the period of observations.

The Vision has produced reports on each of the 7 topics and started engaging the broader public through organized thematic debates and through their online presence: a website and social media profile. I have followed the communication they have put out; I have conducted interviews with two team members. Although the team of the Vision is an autonomous team, they administrate their work through Sofproekt. Furthermore, the main coordinator of the project is the current head of Sofproekt. They keep close communication with the teams of “Green Sofia”, “Sofia – a city for people” and the team in charge of creating a strategy for the sustainable mobility in the city. They act as negotiators, communicators between various stakeholders. They intend to change the way people and institutions see the city and to engage with it:

“Every participant in this environment will have a certain task, which he/she should do in order for the Vision to happen. That is not going to be a document that only the administration has to follow; the Vision should be a document, which will structure the activities of the whole society. It sounds very utopian. But the idea is in 50 years...more people to realize their role and their purpose in the maintenance and development of the city.” Gerasimova, June 2018.

2. Green Sofia.

Green Sofia started as a grass-roots initiative: architects and environmentalists gathered together, produced a green charter of the city and introduced it to the mayor of Sofia. The mayor accepted the project, hand the work to a municipal team, part of a foundation. The team is in charge of creating the sustainable strategy for the city, implementing “green’ policies and ultimately taking part in the competition for European Green Capital Award (EGCA). “Green” is understood as the EGCA defines it in 12 indicator: *“Climate Change: Mitigation, Climate Change: Adaptation, Sustainable Urban Mobility, Sustainable Land Use, Nature and Biodiversity, Air Quality, Noise, Waste, Water, Green Growth and Eco-innovation, Energy Performance, Governance”* (European Commision, 2018). For each of the 12, the city should exhibit progress, backed up by statistical data and with good examples of interventions. The team of Green Sofia is concentrating on three of them: mobility, air quality, and noise pollution.

Their work includes constant interaction with other cities and traveling policies. They compare the city to the previous winners of the award. They establish connections to some of them, drawing lessons on the experience of the cities. Furthermore, they try out projects from elsewhere, such as the “walking to school” initiative. The main influence in their work, however, is the conceptualization of the notion of green – the direct borrowing is not in the policies they apply, but in the way, they problematizes and describe the field of sustainable urban development.

3. Sustainable mobility

The last plan, which is being developed currently, is a plan for sustainable mobility. It is again a municipal initiative, carried out by experts in mobility, urban planning, and architects. The initiative is not a public one – information about it is not easily accessible. However, the team works in close ties with the Vision, “Green Sofia” and “Sofia-city for people” – coordinating their efforts and ideas. During the time of my field

research, I was not able to contact and interview a member of their team. The information I have on their work is taken from the rest of the respondents.

3.3. Conclusion.

Based on the strategies discussed above – documents and initiatives, it is clear that there is at least two ways policy is transferred in the strategic planning of Sofia:

- Through European Union legislation and declarations – in the case of the two municipal strategies for 2014-2020, and Sofia-Green capital.
- Through internationally recognized experts – in the case of the invited team of Gehl Architects.

The first is in line with the literature on Europeanization – understood in a narrow definition: “a response to the policies of the European Union(EU)” (Featherstone, 2003). Calling this effect traveling ideas is more debatable, as the influence of the Union legislation and policies is a complex topic on its own. In a way, as a member state, Bulgaria should not be seen as a place where EU policy is traveling to, but a place which actively contributes to the creation of these policies. However, we can conclude that the strategic urban planning is primarily shaped through a more international scale of EU decisions and agendas.

All strategies use examples of other cities or have a direct connection to other places. In the case of “Green Sofia”- the city is trying to position itself through the European competition, to find visibility. The traveling ideas are connected to cities, winners of the competition. The city needs to belong in a group, to position itself next to other European cities. In the case of “Sofia-city for people” – the examples of other cities are illustrations of what Sofia should be like.

It is important to note that the current strategic initiatives are voluntary. Law does not require them. All of them start as an idea outside of the municipality; they gain political support. Thus the municipal council voted on order for their preparation. The actors involved in them are mainly young experts and professionals that took part in the discussion about the role of the urban planning and the Chief Architect in 2015 and

2016. In a way, the actors, creating these new strategies are new and had no power in the years of the previous Chief Architect. Their ideas of planning are more concerned with the way plans are created, as well as the role of the various stakeholders in the application of the strategies. The idea of participation and dialogue and coordinated interdisciplinary teams are new for the urban planning in the city. Thus the literature on post-socialist is faced with a challenge – is what is happening currently still post-socialist? Do all of these new strategies have post-socialist characteristics or not?

From one side, following the literature on urban governance we might interpret the new plans as new governmental techniques – the accountability is dispersed and the democratic process is interrupted by the obligation for consensus. From another side, the new plans (especially the Vision) are a push against what Hirt (2012) calls privitism. By creating urban strategies, the city is attempting to open the question of what is public and private.

The experience of other cities has an important role in the urban planning. The next chapter categorizes the ways ideas are traveling and the ways they are being used in Sofia.

4. How Do Ideas Travel? How Are They Used? Summary Of The Data Collected Mainly Through Interviews.

Traveling urban policies are a long existing reality. Nowadays the knowledge about cities could travel in person, through academic papers, in online vloggers and so on. There is such an ease in the way one story, one narrative of success or failure could be distributed globally. Conferences and meetings between decision-makers or urban planners are another place in which the various experiences are shared, connections and partnerships are established. However, the use of the traveling ideas is not limited to a straightforward borrowing of a policy. Contrary, the knowledge about what policies cities apply to fix urban problems, or what strategies they have for their future development could be used in many ways. As Cook (2008) argues, a policy is mobile when it is transformed into “successful and applicable”. This chapter deals with the ways an idea is traveling and the ways it is being used in the local context.

The following section analyzes the data collected during the fieldwork in Sofia, including 8 interviews with prominent actors in the urban planning of the city and three public debates on urban topics (organized as part of the planning initiative Vision for Sofia 2050). The respondents all shared their opinion on policy borrowing, the importance of looking for foreign examples and the partnerships they have with other cities. The data was first mapped, creating a personal map of geographic imaginaries for each respondent and juxtaposing them to each other. After, the transcripts of the interviews were coded, tracing the patterns of using traveling ideas and the justification behind it. The obtained information was analyzed based on the map of actors, taking into account the role and the position of the respondents, as well as their relations.

4.1. How Do Urban Policies Travel?

- Naturally.

Personal experience of living and working abroad is one of the main ways ideas and policies travel in the case of the urban planning in Sofia. All of the respondents, not including Edreva and Zdravkov, have spent time studying and working abroad. Professional experience and connections are cited from all respondents (excluding Edreva and Zdravkov). Further, looking at the CVs of the rest of the team members of each planning initiative, all have foreign experience. All members of the Vision, all employees in Sofproekt, the members of Save Sofia, the employees of Placemake – all have had professional and personal experience in another country and kept in touch with friends and colleagues from there. For example, the founder of Placemake, the urban planning company, working on “Sofia-city for people”, studied in the United States, where an associate of Gehl Architects taught him. After coming back in Sofia, he promoted the ideas of Gehl to his partners, and they started experimenting with the methods of research and planning in small projects in Bulgaria. Further, the co-founder of Placemake, spend one year in Melbourne, investigating pedestrian policies, developed in the city by Gehl Architects.

This personal experience transfers ideas and policies from places “naturally”.

- Through conferences, study trips, short-term visits to a place.

Another successful way of transferring ideas and policies is conferences and study trips. This is highly recognized in the literature (Cook, 2008). The university program “Urban planning” in Sofia is developed in collaboration with two universities in Ireland and England. The students go on half year or one year exchange during their studies. Academia is the place where conferences and participation in such events are popular. Prof. Troeva shared in her interview various subjects on which she had taken participation. The most recent one was for urban crime and urban design. Participants from over 20 countries gathered together multiple times in cities such as Milan, Thessaloniki, Jerusalem and shared good and bad practices on the subject.

However, political and administrative actors as well as members of NGOs participate in such visits and gatherings to a lesser degree. The limitations are usually of budget and time. Municipal workers have little incentive to travel and work on networking as well. The members of Save Sofia are limited as well because they have to use their days off work for work on the NGO.

- Urban and professional networks.

Urban networks, especially in EU are an intriguing possibility. According to Georgiev (head of Sofproekt and coordinator of the Vision), it is extremely easy to enter an urban network. For example, Sofproekt is part of METREX. Sofia as a city is active with few projects in URBACT. Except for these two cases, while gathering information on traveling ideas in Sofia, I did not find a significant presence of these networks for the urban planning. I would expect them to be more influential in the future, as all actors confirmed that they have interested in joining such (including Save Sofia, which is in search of a European network of civil organizations similar to them).

- Searching (online) for best practices based on an identified urban problem.

Most of the references to cities, however, are based on knowledge, which circulates as a set of best practices and good examples. Each of the main actors in the planning initiatives in the city researches how are certain problems resolved in other cities. The

information is found online. The verification of the information though is not an easy task. As Georgiev and Chakarova separately confirmed, whether the reality in the particular city matches with the story of success is not easy to know. However, when working, the urban planners are using this information. The section below elaborates on the ways such references and the knowledge about other cities are used.

4.2. Uses Of Traveling Ideas In The Strategic Planning.

No matter how a certain idea travels, it is important why – for what purposes are the actors using it. In the literature review, I emphasized that “success stories” and “best practices” are often used as a tool for depoliticization of public debate (Cook, 2008; Honeck, 2018). Based on the transcripts of the gathered interviews, I elaborate on six uses of the traveling ideas. Bellow, I will present them with examples taken from the interviews. Most of them are shared by all respondents.

- **Learn – to know.**

Each of the respondents expressed the belief in the importance of knowing and being up to date on urban topics. Prof. Troeva, the author of two of the active urban strategies for 2014-2020, said every task they (urban planners) do starts with the search for good practices: “each document starts with the study of analogical documents, good practices, similar plans, and policies that are successfully applied in other countries”. Furthermore, she is the founder of the university BA and MA Urban planning in the Architecture University in Sofia, in collaboration with two other universities: Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh and University College Dublin. For the urban planners in Sofia, it is of huge importance to know what is happening abroad. That fits in with the huge international experience most of the urban planners and architects have. As discussed in the text above, the personal trajectory of most of the actors, involved in creating the current urban strategies of the city, includes living, studying and/or working abroad. However, even this argument of objective academic study of different experiences, had its additional tinge of positioning the local and the global: “especially in regions, where nothing is happening the search for good policies and practices are vital, because, in regions where everything is lifeless, it is difficult to find space for a move.”(Prof. Troeva, June 2018). This additional benefit of the knowledge of possibility is the sixth use.

However, it is important to show that just learning about other cities is not an end on its own. It is always practiced by urban planners, architects, engineers, politicians, civil activists, but the objective is not the knowledge on its own.

- **Position – to compare to be visible.**

Talking with the coordinator of Green Sofia, she highlighted the second use of the urban mobility. Taking part in such competition, Sofia enters in the circle of international attention: “in every similar thing there is a portion of lobbying, meaning that all of these people are good to know Sofia, and to know that the city has these ambitions and is heading that way” (Panayotova, July 2018). Positioning the city in the world of other cities has two main benefits: being aware of how it compares to the others, and being visible. The second could create an appearance of the city as an emerging new attractive place – vital for the narratives that are advertising the city abroad. Even if the circulating urban policies are not translated or implemented, the participation itself could be seen as the goal of the administration to present the city in the best possible way.

Working on green policies, the team of Green Sofia gets in touch with various cities and takes part in conferences, and exchanges contacts with representatives from other cities. They did one of their projects in collaboration with a Spanish company – the Spanish team had the technology to check car emissions while the car is passing by. Green Sofia carried out the one-day initiative on the streets of the city – showing each passing car the amount of the emissions they have. This got them the attention of two reports and an invitation to a conference. Further, they are searching for online platforms, which could give them additional visibility. Being part of the world of cities is highly appreciated and desired. One way to do so is to enter the circle of networks, sharing experiences and building on narratives of “good practices” as self-promotion.

- **Coproduction**

As shown in the example above, the urban policies could happen in coproduction with a team, company or local authority from another city. The work between Green Sofia and

the Spanish team was a small intervention in the traffic world of Sofia. The work of the Chief Architect, Placemake and Gehl Architects, however, has a more clear impact on urban planning. The municipality accepted the report they created in co-production and is currently working on the recommendations for the short and long-term development of the city center.

From the interview with the municipal council Edreva, I found out that the municipality is taking advice from various experts from Vienna and Paris on many subjects, closely linked to the cultural heritage and arts in public space. For example, for an empty plot in the city center, where once the mausoleum of the first Bulgarian communist leader was situated, nowadays there are plans for developing an open-air gallery. On this topic, the municipality is working with cultural managers from Vienna. On another topic – the preservation of architecture in the north of the city center, the municipality is looking at laws developed in Paris in the 60s, concerning the neighborhood of Le Marais. They work with architects and municipal representatives from the city drafting a local policy.

Other cases of coproduction in urban politics could be the networks such as URBACT. Sofia is present in a few projects, part of URBACT. However, during the field research, they were rarely mentioned and not in the context of urban planning and urban development.

- **Support – European Union funding mechanisms.**

Part of the Europeanization could be the funding schemes of the EU. Another incentive for sharing urban solutions and bringing together the policies in different regions of the member states is the possibility for funding. The municipal councilor Edreva, head of the ruling party in the city, confirmed that another reason for the city to search for partners in other cities is the requirement of funding programs for international partnership. However, during the fieldwork, I was not able to identify any strong partnership between Sofia and other European cities in the urban development and urban planning.

The main findings of support I could identify were financing the participation of academics and/or local decision makers in conferences and study groups. Prof. Troeva shared her experience and the academic possibilities in projects, funded by the EU. Yet most of the time the organizers will cover only the cost of the travel and accommodation. Additional resources are usually shared by the sending institution – whether university or municipality. According to Prof. Troeva, Bulgarian institutions don't have the budget for co-financing the participation of the employs.

- **Legitimize – an already taken decision, narratives for de-politicizing.**

Legitimizing is one of the main functions of the use of examples from elsewhere. The mobile urban ideas, such as narratives of success, best practices or even only photos of public space, are used as an argument in favor of a particular agenda.

The team of the Vision had consulted cities like Vienna, Barcelona, Boston, Tel Aviv and more. During their first conference, they flew over the manager of a similar strategy “Imagine Boston”, a team member from the urban planning department in Barcelona and an expert developer for an e-government software in Tel Aviv. When presenting them in front of the audience, Georgiev, the head coordinator of the Vision said:

“We wanted to show that what we do here is not fallen from the Moon, from the sky or just any place. It's not something we came up with on our own, thus absolutely groundless, but are actually processes which had been successfully used in other places”. - Georgiev, 30.10.2017

The geographic imaginary of the “just any place” will be the focus of the next chapter. However, what is important in this phrase is the need not of borrowing certain policies, but justifying the actions of the Vision. During the interview, I asked Georgiev further for the reasons, why it was important to have presentations from these invited experts.

"We searched for validation, here in the Sofian, Bulgarian context, where everything different you suggest is met with: "oh, this won't work; "this is fiction" or "bugger off". – Georgiev, June 2018.

The importance of having the examples from other cities is to convince. The NGO "Save Sofia" performs the same mechanism of convincing:

"We aim to push the decision makers in the municipality, whether through social pressure, through overflow with ideas, or through focusing media attention towards specific topics." – Bonev, July 2018

Overflow with ideas usually means photos, success stories and best practices from cities in the CEE region. Each time the organization proposes a solution to an urban issue they first consult with their personal contacts in Prague, Budapest and so on. For example, they write to the ex-minister of transport in Budapest and ask him for detailed plans of their tramways. When they critique the municipality for the condition of the pavement, they show a photo from a perfectly neat pavement in Prague. The example of other cities is crucial for convincing the audience in the message they send and of convincing the municipality to act accordingly. The project they spend a lot of their resources was the establishment of night transport in Sofia. They spend five years arguing with the municipality, developing a detailed budget plan, proposing specific routes and stations for the night buses and collecting more than 30 000 signatures from citizens of Sofia. Their campaign included examples of night public transport from other capitals in the EU, as well as capitals of neighbor countries, not included in the Union. Referencing the world of cities is a powerful tool for convincing your opposition and legitimizing your proposals.

The municipality used the borrowing of urban models for justifying certain urban policies they want to overtake. By referring to Paris, or Copenhagen, they dismantle the opposing argument. There is no place for a political argument when something is already proven to be successful.

- **Change – to change the worldview of the opposition.**

The last use of traveling ideas is connected with the power of the “best practices” to convince. All urban planners, as well as the NGO and the municipality of the city, are trying to change the society using the example of other places. They prove that a certain reality is possible and desirable, thus leading to a change in people’s mindset. The difference with the legitimization is little; it is more to do with the intentions of the actors themselves.

When asked what the benefits of working with Gehl Architects are, inviting them in Sofia and producing the document “Sofia-city for people”, most of the respondents were reserved when talking about a direct change of the urban model. However, they all mentioned a version of the following:

“The benefits are that the society, hearing the same ideas repeated from different sources, starts getting used to them, to accept them, to want them.” - Save Sofia, Bonev, July 2018.

“I’m mostly happy that what we managed to achieve with Gehl Architects is to change the mindset of the politicians because at the end of the day money is following the political decisions.” Chief Architect Zdravkov, July 2018.

“If before this topic was unfamiliar and they (municipality) were not sure why Gehl should come and make such a report, and how this will help, after one year we have built stronger working relations with the administration.” - Placemake, Chakarova, June 2018.

The first is the NGO talking about how the citizens change their mindset. The second is the Chief Architect talking about how the politicians change, and the last one is the private urban planning company Placemake, referring to the change that happened in the administration of the municipality.

Prof. Troeva was a bit more ironic with her answer: *“To shake a bit the urban model, someone else should tell them, someone bigger than us, but not to trust the local expertise”* (Prof. Troeva, June 2018). She argued that what Gehl Architects are promoting as necessary urban development, is not unfamiliar to the Bulgarian urban planners. Contrary, she has participated multiple times in developing plans for pedestrianization of the city center. However, she admits that the plans, produced locally, were neglected. The plan, developed by a “someone bigger” was attracting public attention from media, academia, citizen’s organizations and politicians.

4.3.The Actual Translation Of The Policies And Implementation In The City.

Perhaps it is unsettling that I have not included the implementation of a fast solution to an urban problem as a main use of the urban mobile policies. The literature on traveling ideas already determines that the urban borrowings are a complex translation, ending with a mutation, a collage, or a parody of the original (Honeck, 2018). Although all respondents agreed on the possibility for learning and implementing an already discovered solution, they all were reserved when talking about the actual implementation:

These are some of the quotes from the interviews, all discussing the impossibility for direct implementation of a policy - the “no copy-paste” effect:

“Actually, there is no way you can take something ready (cut and dry); it is adapting to the current moment, current local context. - Gerasimova, June 2018.

“Because there is no copy-paste. That doesn't work. For good or for bad”. - Panayotova, June 2018.

“Always with the condition that we have to bear in mind the local context.” - Chakarova, June 2018.

“Direct transfer of a model, even the Paris one, won't work. – Zdravkov, July 2018.

"It can't be applied directly, for sure, because the conditions are different." - Edreva, June 2018.

"We try to adapt it for the conditions in Sofia. Because it is not possible to transfer 'mot-a-mot'" - Zografski, July 2018.

What travels are overall principals and goals. One reason is that strategies are composed mainly by abstract ideas such as being "green" and "smart". Another is that planning is a conservative practice, strictly regulated from place to place. The way planning is performed is not an urban policy that could be replicated – the specific low, the configuration of stakeholders, their resources and interrelations are factors that will alter the possibility of urban planning. The examples from abroad were mainly used as argumentative tools, convincing and changing the perception of the other actors involved in the urban planning. The direct borrowings or translation of urban mobile policies were rare and are usually connected to complying with a European Union decision.

Some initiatives of Green Sofia were borrowings from EGCA awarded cities. Such initiatives included creating a map for urban plots suitable for urban farming and an initiative for walking to school.

However, most of the time, the information about urban policies and practice from abroad, had a very specific and small-scale impact on the urban planners in Sofia:

"Because when we talked to the other cities, we established that is very helpful to go through the process on your own, that brings you a lot of information and changes the way you gather and analyze data." - Panayotova, June 2018.

"...even if it sounds funny, the other cities thought us that we need to know our own city." - Georgiev, June 2018.

The topic of data collection and data analysis came up unexpectedly from the field, and it requires special attention, as it serves as a link between the traveling ideas and the post-socialist theory.

4.4.The Topic Of Data.

One of the shared topics, reoccurring in all interviews and public discussions is the issue of collecting and analyzing data. The municipality does not have an integrated unified platform for distributing data sets. Some departments have not digitalized their database; others do not collect it with a georeference. Some departments are keen on sharing information, while others try to keep it away from the public. At the beginning of the Vision, the team is faced with the long procedures for acquiring statistical data. “Green Sofia” is mostly working on gathering data on all 12 criteria for the EU competition. The coordinator of the project shares the frustration of inaccessible or unusable data. Such frustration is shared by other coordinators as well:

“Parallel to our job, we work on changing the way municipality gathers and utilizes data. This is something that gives huge recourses for analysis and designing policies, as well as the evaluation of policies. It is an initiative we have with the municipality, to have all data digital”. –Panayotova, June 2018.

“Right now we work fragmented because we have no unified database for the whole city. We are just starting to put the pieces together. There is data from 20 years back, which is good if we want to do a comparison with the past, but we do not know much about the current situation of the city.” – Georgiev, June 2018.

The lack of digitalized data, gathered on an urban scale with georeference, is a problem for the strategic planning. Data is the basis for legitimization. Urban governance and participation in urban decision-making are based as well on the collective access to adequate and rich statistical data. In a post-socialist data collecting and analysis, the situation is slightly different. Data is gathered separately, partially; sometimes it is in easily manipulated digital software, sometimes it is on paper. In such a situation the narrative about what the city is, what the city could become lacks foundations. Perhaps the traveling ideas, the example of other cities are substituting this gap.

Strategies need a strong and easily understandable story, narrative, to be accepted. Strategic planning includes developing scenarios, based on the expected future developments of various economic and social statistical parameters. The scenarios could be visualized, explained, put in simple slogans, such as “green” or “competitive”. However, when there is a lack of data, the examples of other cities could provide the necessary visualization of the urban possibilities. Thus where we look for inspiration and knowledge is the basis for the urban strategy of the city. In the literature review, I quoted Healey and Upton (2010), saying that nowadays the traveling ideas are more global, opposing the previous colonial hegemony of knowledge-production. The next chapter investigates the geographic imaginaries of the urban planners in Sofia, to show what cities and countries are influencing their idea of urban possibilities and limitations.

5. The Importance of Geographic Imaginaries.

“In principle we attempt to work with European cities. Our aim is to look like Vienna, like Paris.” – Chief Architect Zdravkov, July 2018.

“Bulgaria won’t be Switzerland on the Balkans, but Sofia could be Prague on the Balkans.”
– Save Sofia, Bonev, July 2018.

“Sofia should look further and closer, east and west, north and south.” – Placemake, Chakarova, June 2018.

How we perceived the world is a core element of the way urban policies travels. As part of the research of what ideas are used in the strategic planning of Sofia and how are they used, I wanted to obtain information on the geographic imaginary of the main actors. Geographic imaginaries are “geography that overlaps more tangible geography and helps shape our attitude to people and places” (Howie and Lewis, 2014:133). In a world of cities, one city is constructed in relation to other cities. In this section, I will present the mapped out qualitative data, gathered in interviews – the maps, not included in the text could be found in the appendix. Each respondent was asked from where she/he thinks Sofia should borrow ideas for its development. Furthermore, all examples of cities, given during the interview are mapped as well. The mentioned places are divided into the following categories:

- **Personal experience:** as most of the respondents had studied, lived and worked abroad, the personal experience and contacts are vital.
- **Partners:** cities which have certain work-relation with the respondent.
- **Positive:** cities, Sofia should aim at resembling
- **Negative/irrelevant examples:** cities, which are not an example to follow, whether due to huge differences with Sofia or due to undesirable urban model.
- **Neutral:** cities, given as examples, without explicit positive or negative nuance.

The maps of geographic imaginaries were juxtaposed to show the differences between the actor's dispositions. The following figures show the visualized worlds of cities, important imaginaries for the strategic planning in Sofia.

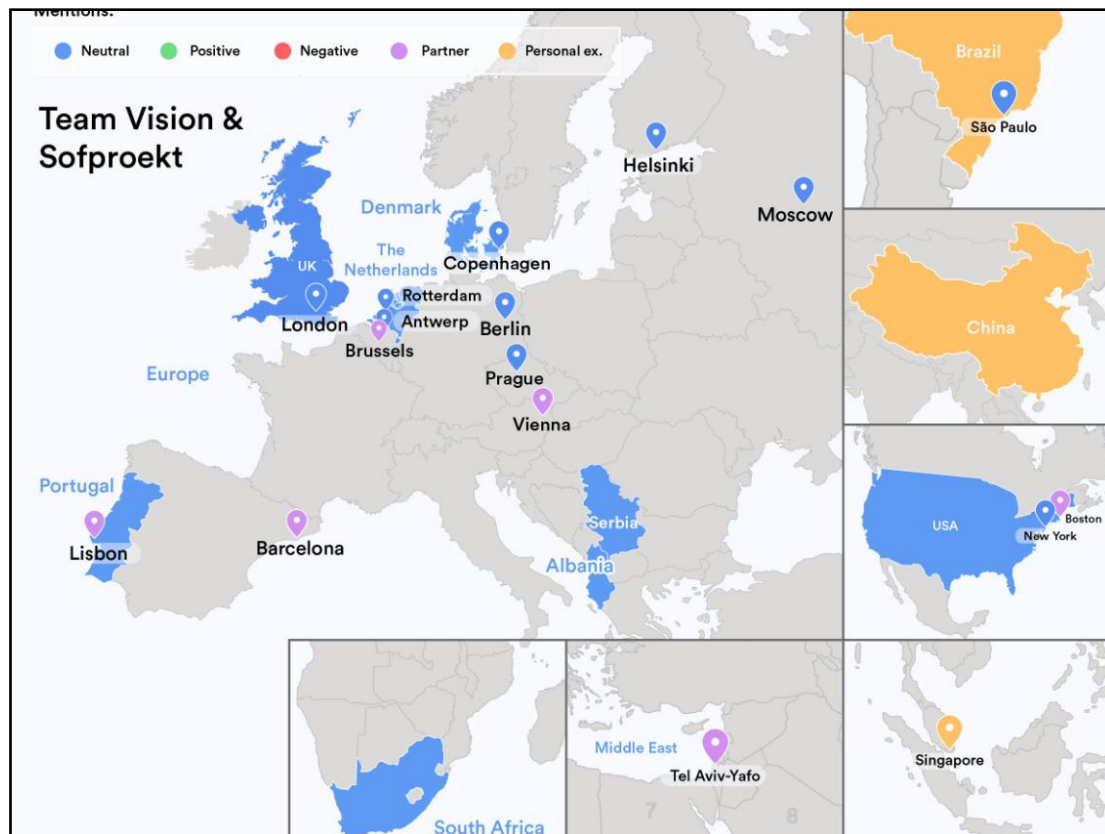


Figure 4. Map of geographic imaginary of “Vision for Sofia 2050”. Based on interviews with M. Gerasimova and L. Georgiev, June 2018. Source: the author.

This map represents cities and places referred to in my interviews with two of the team members of The Vision. Each of the team members of the initiative has experience –

work and/or education in another country. Few of them are noted on the map - China, Singapore, and Brazil. The purple dots are the places where the Vision has established contact and partnerships. Such cities are Vienna, Boston, Tel Aviv, and Barcelona. They have a higher impact on the way the Vision works, the ideas they promote for better urban planning. Guests from these cities give presentations which should convince others of the benefits of what they propose. The guest from Tel Aviv had to present on a platform for e-governance (he was not able to present at the last moment), an urban planner from Barcelona was presenting a well-structured story of the successful transformation of the city, based on its good urban plans and strategies in the last two decades. A representative of "Imagine Boston" was promoting a more open, participatory way of urban planning. The blue dots are places, mentioned during the interviews without a direct connotation of "best" or "worst" practice. The two respondents from the Vision, contrary to the rest of the respondents, were limited in the use of normative connotations. They mentioned each continent and world direction. According to the innovation and good ideas are not bound to a geographic place: they can be seen all around the world. The personal experiences of the team members are in line with such a statement. However, Georgiev acknowledged there is a European focus. For him, the "European" was not bound to the boundaries of EU. In his imaginary Europe was including cities such as Tirana and Moscow. The focus is presupposed by the EU politics, but is also reflective of what Georgiev termed "desire to belong". Belonging to the group of Europeans is a strong incentive in the geographic imaginary in Sofia, which has its impact on the urban policies.

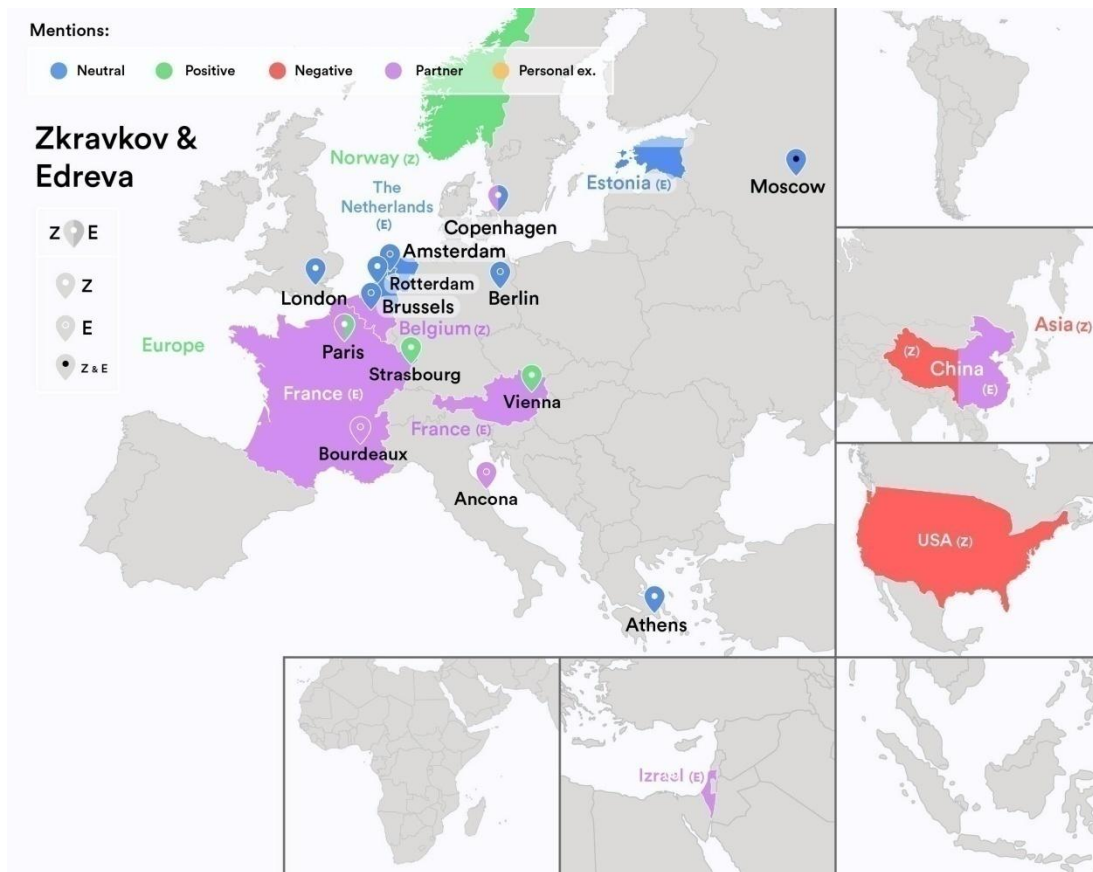


Figure 5. Map of geographic imaginary of the political actors: municipal council Edreva and the Chief Architect Zdravkov, July 2018. Source: the author.

Contrary of the Vision, the political actors, have strong opinions of model cities. *“Our aim is to look like Vienna, like Paris.”* - Said the Chief Architect Zdravkov. According to him, cities from other continents like such in China or USA are irrelevant due to their completely different urban pattern. Furthermore, he described Europe as the oldest continent, a place of layers of history that are visible in the urban form. This statement, of course, is easily contestable, but what is important is to see what significance the Chief Architect is giving to the European context.

The head of the ruling party in the Municipal Council, Edreva, praised the close link with European cities that Sofia has. Based on the idea of no boundaries (for EU members) and the mutual support, Edreva gave mainly examples of partners in member states. Further in the conversation, however, she mentioned the strong ties Bulgaria has with Israel and the potential future good partnership with China. The last has no direct link to the urban

level. However, it shows that even the different historical, economic and social context of another place is not a reason to dismiss the potential political partnership.

The strongest imaginary, based on a city was linked to Copenhagen. Edreva described it as a “city of the future”. This future is thus in the present time, but geographically situated elsewhere. Sofia will try to reach this future, by learning from Copenhagen. What is not clear is the urban model connected to Copenhagen according to the local authorities in Sofia. According to Zdravkov contemporary European cities are compact, they are walkable, encourage the use of public transport and cycling. However, how exactly that will be done, each city has its model – London uses high taxation, but Paris, as a more socialist-democratic city cannot implement similar restrictions. For Zdravkov these are political decisions, and the city is searching for its model – its political decisions that will bring the contemporary European urban form alive.

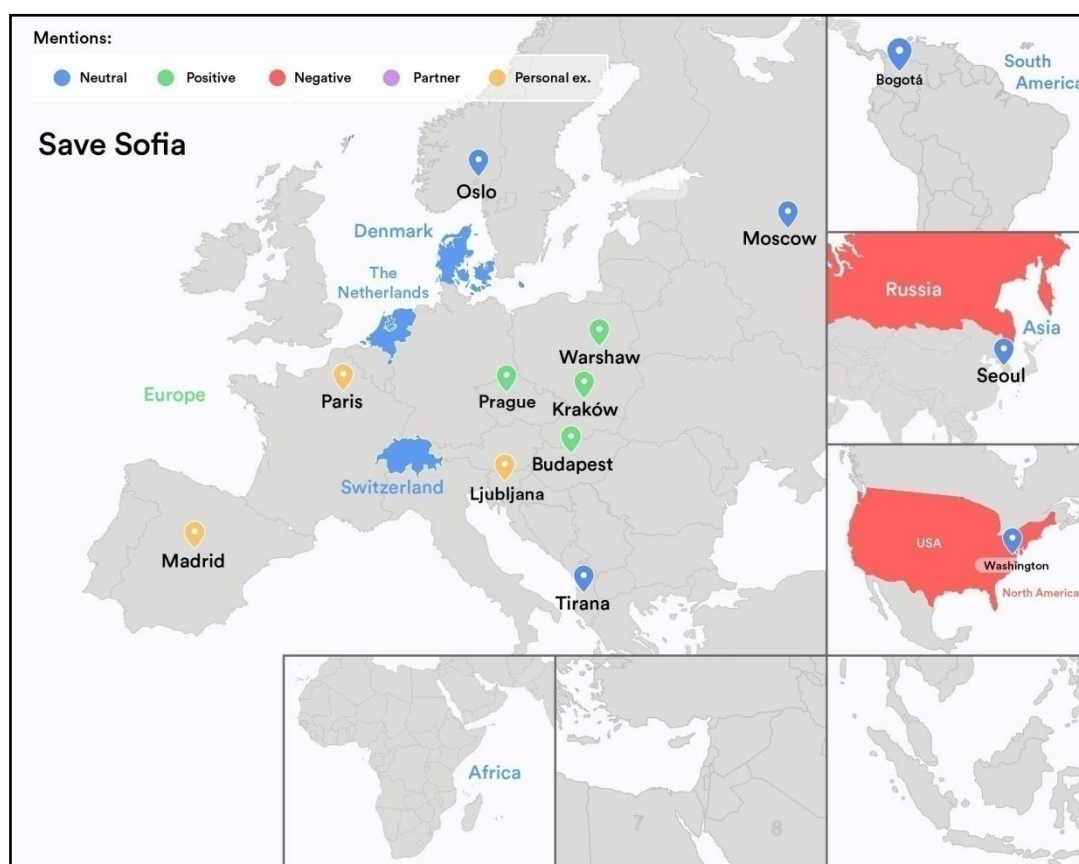


Figure 6. Map of geographic imaginary Save Sofia, July 2018. Source: the author.

The strongest in their statements about geographic imaginaries were the NGO “Save Sofia”. As they use the example of other cities constantly in their confrontation with the municipality, Save Sofia has chosen cities, closer geographically and historically to Sofia. For them, it is important to look at cities with a similar budget and social configurations so that the example would be taken seriously. According to them many times decision makers and citizens do not take examples that do not fit within the budget of Sofia. Although the NGO shares the opinion that solutions and innovations could be found on every continent, they see Asian and American (North American) cities as irrelevant, because these cities do not fit with the idea of sustainable and progressive development. Most of the examples they use are urban policies in cities from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Save Sofia believes that Sofia should become “Prague on the Balkans”. The geographic construct of the Balkans is problematic on its own. When asked what it consists of, the respondents backed down, arguing that Bulgaria is not as Balkan, like its neighbors from Serbia for example, because the first is not as loud and warm-hearted as the second. Bulgarians according to the respondent were more like Soviets – the country is grey, corrupt and unprogressive.

The urban planners from the Vision and Placemake are less prompted to direct normative statements. A place, for them, could be the source of both negative and positive examples of various urban issues. Their maps include a wider range of possibilities. From their personal to their professional experience, the map of cities is wide and should be taken into account. However, they also share a European focus, due to the possibilities for encounters and the feeling of belonging. For the political and the municipal actors, Europe is of even more important – the normative statements about the future, which lies in a specific geography, rather a specific time, are all connected to capitals and big cities of member states of the EU.

The maps are showing that the actors are not quoting the same places with the same intentions. Most of the differences occur in places such as in North or South America and Asia. It is not clear to what extent they are relevant or desirable. For the municipal council, China could be a good partner in urban issues in the future, perhaps because of the political possibilities of China they expect to have. For the Chief Architect, the Chinese cities are irrelevant, due to differences in the urban pattern. The example of

Moscow is interesting – it is a European city, in Asia, with traditional links to Sofia, but with unsolved relationship issues from the recent past. Most actors mention Moscow – they all follow the latest developments in the city. Even when they quote it as an example, they do not use the same underlining explanations. For the municipal council Moscow and Sofia have traditional links; for the urban planners from Placemake, Moscow is interesting, because Gehl Architects worked with the city; for Save Sofia Moscow is a mixed example - it is not democratic, but at the same time the local authorities have the political power to implement desirable mobility solutions.

Geographic imaginaries do shape the path of traveling ideas. The notions of relevant and irrelevant experience, desirable and undesirable, successful and unsuccessful are easily connected just to a place or a region in the world. This performed geography is both influenced by and influencing the narratives of “best practices”. European cities have a dominant position in the imaginary of progressive, modern and successful. In historical perspective, nothing had changed – pre-socialist Sofia was strongly influenced by the narrative of “becoming European” (Nikiforov and Nikiforova, 2016). Thus the place a policy travels from (not originates from, but is connected to) is one of the criteria for its successful travel. Policies “fallen from the Moon” would not have the same value. The same way when one of the respondents said: “someone bigger than us” she means someone from a more prestigious position. The prestige and value of urban policy are carefully constructed, and one of its elements is connected to its geography.

CONCLUSION

This thesis is a dive into the traveling ideas in urban planning in a post-socialist context. I had the intention to look at one case – Sofia and to answer how and to what extent traveling ideas and geographic imaginaries influence the post-socialist strategic planning. The case consists of discourse analysis of three active city strategies, as well as observation of three ongoing planning initiatives in Sofia. The actors were mapped, and the connections between them were analyzed using actor-centered institutionalism approach. Further 8 interviews were conducted with the main actors, on the topic of traveling ideas – how and why they use the example of other cities in the planning of Sofia.

The post-socialist theory helps in understanding the continuity and discontinuity in recent decades in the city. Specifically for urban planning, the sharp municipal withdraw from planning is a discontinuity. However, institutional arrangements and expert positions, such as the Chief Architect are continuity. The current situation puts the academic literature to the test – planning is becoming more and more visible, actors from various fields are pushing towards the creation of strategies, and they are opposing the top-down approach of urban planning.

The strategic planning enters the city operational mechanisms in the past less than two decades, through world organizations such as the World Bank and the European Union. The membership of the country in the European Union intensifies the importance of strategic plans, as well as sets the standards for the strategic plans. However, strategies do not seem to be enough for the reimagining of the city's future. Currently in the city, there are three active plans and three planning initiatives in motion.

The need for re-inventing of the narrative of the city should be seen as one of the post-socialist features. The presence of multiple strategies, made only years apart, incline that the narratives created for the city are not strong enough to consolidate the variety of actors – political, administrative, experts, civic organizations and so on. In the set of strategies, we can distinguish such that lean towards more neoliberal, market-oriented urban development, as well as such promoting livability with a focus in the urban design

and architecture. However, most of the current planning initiatives are voluntary and do not obligate the local government in any way. Thus the need for reinvention results in the accumulation of narratives about the city.

Another of the post-socialist elements of the urban planning in Sofia is the position of the existing and available data. Data is extremely necessary for creating the profile of the city and predicting its future development. In the lack of data, it is the traveling ideas and mobile policies, which influence the process of restructuring the planning in the city. Strategies, as narratives, are highly susceptible to “best practices” and “success stories”. Stories about “smart”, “green”, or “livable” cities are a constant feature of the creation of the plans. As I show in the analysis of my fieldwork, the knowledge about the world of cities provides the local actors with the basis for argumentation of their aims. Traveling ideas, even if not implemented, are used for the legitimization of various agendas. One city, one project, could serve as proof for the success of an urban policy. They are, as well, used as a motive for change – change of mindset, change of worldview. From the “natural” experiences of the actors to the urban networks in which the city takes part, the knowledge about what and how other cities are doing is of huge importance for Sofia.

These connections reshape the horizon of possibilities, but also act as a political argument. Other cities are used as a normative statement. One place, one city, could be used for the legitimization of different aims. For example the city of Thessaloniki could be a negative example of urban mobility and a good example of urban public space. Well constructed narratives for “best practices” eliminate the need for a political decision, as the success of such practices is already proven. The narratives of somebody else’s success substitute the need for easily understandable and publically accessible data. They also fall into the geographic imaginary of certain parts of the world as “ahead” in time – they represent the future. Thus we do not need to ask ourselves what the future holds. The city should only look abroad and imitate places, which are constructed as desired. Appearing as Vienna, or Paris, or Copenhagen, or Prague is the strategy of Sofia for the future. Some actors in the urban planning of the city are critical towards such simplified statements. Expert planners do acknowledge the fact that “best practices” could appear as such, but in reality could be more complex and controversial.

The process of transferring, or just referencing mobile urban policies, relies on the actors and their connections with the world of cities. Their knowledge and understandings about “elsewhere” shape the flows of urban policies. The geographic imaginary of the main actors acts as a restrictor for the traveling ideas.

In the concrete post-socialist context, of a country member of EU, the geographic imaginaries are tightly connected to big European cities, mainly from the Union. Sofia is thought through Vienna, Paris, Copenhagen, and Prague. The European focus could be seen as Europeanization in the broad sense – “exhibiting similar attributes to those that predominate in, or are closely identified with, ‘Europe’.”(Featherstone, 2003:3). Other parts of the world have double standards – for some actors in the urban planning, they are too far away, too different and irrelevant for the experience of Sofia. For other actors, mainly the urban planners in charge of the new strategies, solutions to urban problems could be found everywhere. Interestingly the personal experience of the young professionals is geographically broader – including places like China, Brazil, Australia, USA, and Singapore. The personal experience is a key factor, as almost all of the actors in the field of urban planning have some personal experience and ties with another place.

On the subject of how planning is carried out, Sofia is looking at cities such as Brussels, Boston, Tel Aviv, Vienna, Barcelona and many more. In the end, there are little concrete urban policies in the field of urban planning, which are being translated in Sofia. It is the overall approach of trying out and searching for the right way to include the local society and institutions together.

The existence in a world of cities could be understood as the constant possibility of being in a dialogue with these cities. The example of the success of other cities is easily employed as an irrefutable argument. For a post-socialist context, accompanied with the narrative of lagging behind, urban policies from a Western European country are, without a doubt – the future. The geography they are associated with gives them an additional time region; space and time create resistant imaginary of development and progress.

An urban researcher should take into account the influence of the example of other cities. First of all the academia is one of the active creators of narratives of success. Second, the city will employ its connections, and this will impact the way a policy is understood and applied. The set of actors involved in the urban planning and the relations between them are of huge importance as well. In my case, the actors were exhibiting slightly different geographic imaginaries, which creates a different world of cities influencing Sofia.

The idea about mobile urban policies as a healing pill is rarely shared between professionals. However, the story about the success is an important tool for changing the mind of the opposition regarding various topics: from policies promoting cycling to municipal laws in favor of state-led gentrification. Thus the experience of cities, mainly cities declared as “cities of the future”, is a powerful tool for political argumentation. In this case, it is important that the knowledge about projects in other cities is shared and well understood. A lot of the times polished and simplified version of urban experience is the only knowledge available. There is a risk of using insufficient knowledge about simplified stories, as a solid argument for changing the city in a certain direction. There is also benefit in broadening the horizon of possibilities in the urban reality. In the post-socialist strategic planning, we can observe the complexity of borrowing and translating traveling ideas from around the world. We can also see the dominance of a European context. Even this European is a contested meaning, as the boundaries of the geography of Europe are not clear. The meeting point of such intertwined geographic imaginaries is symptomatic for the unevenness of the “world of cities”.

The way traveling ideas are used in the urban planning should happen with great consideration for the power of convincing and legitimizing they hold. Additionally knowledge about the actors and institutions, their own agenda and the benefits they will have from implementing one traveling idea over another has to be taken into account. Finally, special attention should be paid to the geographies of travel – one policy is not “naturally” more successful and desirable, because it comes from a certain place.

Bibliography

- Albrechts, L., (2012) "Reframing strategic spatial planning by using a coproduction perspective", *Planning Theory*, 12(1) 46 –63.
- Bodnar, J., (2001) *Fin de Millénaire Budapest : Metamorphoses of Urban Life*. London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Brenner, N., (2004) *New state spaces, urban governance and the rescaling of statehood*, New York: Oxford university press.
- Bulgaria. Department of Architecture and urban planning, Gehl Architect and Placemake (2017) *Sofia-city for people*. Available in English on <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cNSchrBMb6bxeQ4zIslrd8J25W7qyctM/view> (accessed 30 August 2018).
- Bulgaria. Municipality of Sofia (2014) 'Интегрален план за градско възстановяване и развитие на гр. София 2014-2020' [Integrated plan for the urban regeneration and development of Sofia city 2014-2020]. Available in Bulgarian on <https://www.sofia-agk.com/FileBrowser/File?path=esoft.portal%2Ffigvr%2Ffinal%2FPRILOJENIE%201-OKONCHATELEN%20PROEKT.pdf> (accessed 30 August 2018).
- Bulgaria. Municipality of Sofia (2014) 'Областна стратегия за развитието на област София-град 2014-2020' [Strategy for the development of Sofia-city 2014-2020]. Available in Bulgaria on https://www.sofia.bg/documents/20182/420193/00_OSr_SOFIA_Final_02.07_2013.pdf/a377d1c7-e221-4e50-8bd7-07b85261ae9c (accessed 30 August 2018).
- Bulgaria. Municipality of Sofia (2016) 'Визия за София: Методически насоки за разработване на дългосрочна визия за развитие на София и крайградските територии' [Vision for Sofia: Methodological framework for the development of long-term vision for the development of Sofia and its adjoining territories], available in Bulgarian on <https://vizia.sofia.bg/> (accessed 30 August 2018).
- Caldeira, T. and Holston, J., (2015) "Participatory urban planning in Brazil", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 52(11) 2001–2017.
- Císař, O. (2013b) ,Post-communism and social movements_ In: Snow D. et al eds. *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*. London: Blackwell, pp. 994–9.
- Cook, Ian (2008) *Mobilising Urban Policies: The Policy Transfer of US Business Improvement Districts to England and Wales*. *Urban Studies*, 45 (4). pp. 773-795. ISSN0042-0980
- De Certeau, M. (1984) *The practice of everyday life*. London: University of California Press.
- European Green Capital Award. 2021 EGCA. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/index_en.htm (accessed 30 August 2018)
- Featherstone, Kevin, and Claudio M. Radaelli. *The Politics of Europeanization*, Oxford University Press USA -OSO, 2003. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kbdk/detail.action?docID=3052703>. Created from kbdk on 2018-06-08 03:36:06.

- Ferenčuhová, S. and Gentile, M., (2016) Introduction: Post-socialist cities and urban theory, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 57:4-5, 483-496
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006) "Five misunderstandings about case-study research", *Qualitative inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 219-245
- Friedmann, J. (1986) 'The world city hypothesis'. *Development urrd Churtae*. SAGE, London, Beverly Hills and New Delhi, Vol. 17 (1986). 69-83
- Friedmann, J., (2008) "The Uses of Planning Theory. A Bibliographic Essay", *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 28:247-257.
- Gonzales, S. (2006) 'Scalar Narratives in Bilbao: A Cultural Politics of Scales Approach to the Study of Urban Policy'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 30 (4): 836–857
- Gupta, J., Pfeffer K., Verrest, H. and Ros-Tonen, M., (Ed.). (2015) *Geographies of Urban Governance Advanced Theories, Methods and Practices*, London: Springer.
- Harris, A. and Moore, S. (2013) 'Planning histories and practices of circulating urban knowledge'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 37 (5): 1499-509, DOI:10.1111/1468-2427.12043.
- Healey, P. and Upton, R. (Ed.). (2010) *Crossing borders. International exchange and planning practices*. New York: Routledge
- Hirt, S. (2012) *Iron Curtains. Gates, Suburbs and Privatization of Space in the Post-socialist City*. Chichester: WileyBlackwell
- Hirt, S. and Stoilov, K. (2007) 'The perils of post-socialist transformation: Residential development in Sofia'. In: Stoilov, K. eds. *The post-socialist city*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Hirt, S., (2013) "Whatever happened with the post-socialist city", *Cities*, 32 (2013) S29-S38
- Honeck, T. (2018) 'A touch of post-truth: the roles of narratives in urban policy mobilities'. *Geographica Helvetica*, 73, 133–145.
- Howard, M. (2003) *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Howie B., Lewis N., (2014), Geographic imaginaries: articulating the values of geography in New Zealand *Geographer* 70, 131-139
- Jessop, B., (1993) „Reviewed Work(s): Habermas and the Public Sphere. by Craig Calhoun“, *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 614-616
- Jouve, B., (2005) "From Government To Urban Governance In Western Europe: A Critical Analysis", *Public Administration And Development*, 25, 285–294.
- Lund, Ch. (2014) "Of What is This a Case?: Analytical Movements in Qualitative Social Science Research", *Human Organization*, Vol. 73, No. 3
- Massey, D. (2004) *Geographies of responsibility*. *Geogr. Ann.*, 86 B (1): 5-18.
- Mukhtarov, F. (2014) *Rethinking the travel of ideas: Policy translation in the water sector, in Policy and Politics*, DOI: 10.1332/030557312X655459
- Natalie Koch (2013) *Why Not a World City? Astana, Ankara, and Geopolitical Scripts in Urban Networks*, *Urban Geography*, 34:1, 109-130, DOI:10.1080/02723638.2013.778641

- Nikiforov, I. and Nikiforova, M. (2016) *Urban Planning in Bulgaria in 20th and 21st century in the context of European Urban Planning*. Sofia: Slavenna
- Pierre, J. and Peters, G. (2012) 'Urban Governance'. In: Mossberger, K. et al. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Urban Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.x
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995) 'Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis'. *Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8, 5–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839950080103>
- Rhodes, R.A.W., (1996) „The new governance: Governing without government“, *Political studies*, Vol.44(4), pp.652-667
- Robinson, J. (2002) 'Global and world cities: a view from off the map'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 26 (3):531:554
- Robinson, J. (2006) *Ordinary cities: between modernity and development*. London: Routledge.
- Robinson, J., (2011) „Cities in a World of Cities: The Comparative Gesture“, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol.35.1, 1-23
- Robinson, J., (2015) „Thinking cities through elsewhere: Comparative tactics for a more global urban studies“, *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 40(I) 3-29
- Sassen, S., (2005) „The Global City: Introducing a Concept“, *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp.27-43
- Sheppard, E. (2002). The spaces and times of globalization: place, scale, networks, and positionality. *Economic Geography*, 78(3), 307-330.
- Stead D., Jong M., and Reinholde I., 2009, West-east policy transfer: the case of urban transport policy., research gate online
- Stone, D. (2012) Transfer and translation of policy'. *Policy studies*, 33 (6):483-499
- Suitner, J., (2015) *Imagineering Cultural Vienna: On the Semiotic Regulation of Vienna's Culture-led Urban Transformation*. Vienna: Transcript Verlag
- Swyngedouw, E., (2005) "Governance Innovation and the Citizen: The Janus Face of Governance-beyond-the-State", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 11, 1991–2006.
- Tange, A. (2015) 'Introduction: Cities and the Narratives That Build Them'. *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 48, (2), 7-14.
- Torsello, D. (2012) „The “revival” of civil society in Central Eastern Europe: New environmental and political movements.“ *Human Affairs*, 22(2).
- Tsenkova, S. (2007) 'Urban futures: Strategic planning in post-socialist Europe'. In: Stoilov, K. eds. *The post-socialist city*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Tuvikene, T., (2016) “Strategies For Comparative Urbanism: Post-socialism as a De-territorialized Concept”, International Journal Of Urban And Regional Research, DOI:10.1111/1468-2427.12333

Van Lieshout, H. (2008) *An actor-centered institutionalist approach to flexicurity: the example of vocational education and training*. Hanzehogeschool Groningen

Appendix

List of Figures:

Figure 1. Map of Sofia, history of development, source: Sofia-city for people, Gehl Architects, 2017

Figure 2. Map of key actors in the urban planning in Sofia, 2018. Source: the author.

Figure 3. Visualization of current active strategic plans and planning initiatives in Sofia, 2018. Source: the author

Figure 4. Map of geographic imaginary of “Vision for Sofia 2050”. Based on interviews with M.Gerasimova and L.Georgiev, June 2018.

Figure 5. Map of Geographic Imaginary of the political actors: municipal council Edreva and the Chief Architect Zdravkov, July 2018

Figure 6. Map of Geographic imaginary Save Sofia, July 2018

List of interviews:

1. M. Gerasimova, coordinator of two topics in the Vision (out of 7) – “People” and “Culture and Identity.” 13.06.2018, a café next to her office.
2. L. Georgiev – main coordinator of the Vision and head of the municipal urban planning enterprise “Sofproekt.” 26.06.2018, the office of Sofproekt.
3. E. Panayotova – coordinator of Sofia-Green capital. 27.06.2018, the office of Sofia-Green capital.
4. S. Chakarova – copartner of Placemake – urban planning private company, developing in partnership with the Municipality and Gehl Architects “Sofia – city for People.” 02.07.2018, the café “Architect’s Club”.
5. M. Edreva – chairwoman of GRRB (leading party) in the Municipal Council, head of Department of Culture. 29.06.2018, her office in the main building of the municipality.
6. Z. Zdravkov – Chief Architect of Sofia. 11.07.2018, his office.
7. Prof. Troeva – head of Center for National Territorial planning and the founder of Urban Planning University subject. Author of “Regional strategy for development of Sofia, 2014-2020” and the “Integrated plan for urban regeneration and development of Sofia, 2014-2020”. 29.06.2018, her office in the National Center for Territorial Planning.
8. B. Bonev and A. Zografski – foundation members of the NGO “Save Sofia.” 01.07.2018, the open garden behind the king’s palace (currently National Gallery).

Maps of geographic imaginary (not included in the text):

