

*Venets: The Belgradchik Journal for Local History, Cultural Heritage and Folk Studies*  
Volume 5, Number 1, 2014

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*Research*

## **A POLITICS OF SPACE AND THE HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION OF INDIVIDUALS: A CASE STUDY OF BULGARIA<sup>1)</sup>**

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**Abstract.** This study focuses on non-discursive practices connected to the transformation of individuals in the context of Bulgaria. It constitutes an attempt at presenting a decentred history of the present through the vantage point of the architecture of the panel block. Under totalitarianism, the panel block constitutes an institutionalization of a specific politics of space in Bulgaria through which it is shown that the ‘socialist citizen’ becomes an entity that can be constructed or *made*. During the last years of the regime and after the transition to democracy, the functioning of power relations within the panel block are significantly altered, yet not completely erased. The revolution of 1989 is a symbiosis between a certain discontinuity with the past and a contradiction of the old forms of subjectivities, and on the other, a silent continuity of the everyday lives of individuals. Today, the panel structures remain, in the peripheries of the cities, still reminiscent of a time passed, yet visually

signifying a new representation, a façade of the contemporary Bulgarian reality. The panel block is a ‘microcosm’ of the Bulgarian society.

*Keywords:* panels, totalitarianism, Bulgaria, genealogy, identity, subjectivity, Michel Foucault

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## **Introduction**

Bulgaria’s history is marked by transformations. Within less than sixty-five years, the country has moved from a Soviet-style totalitarian regime to a consolidating democracy and member of the European Union. The transition away from totalitarianism over the last twenty-four years in Eastern and Central Europe is a phenomenon with which historians are well acquainted. What require further investigations however, are the specific relations of power and domination within these regimes, whose stability seemed, to varying degrees, unquestionable only months before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Today, we are inclined to consider the history of totalitarianism, in the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern and Central Europe, as a slow progress away from Stalinism in the early years and towards ‘consensus’ and ‘normalization’ in the following decades. Perhaps, this quantitative transformation of less physical cruelty and subjection on the one hand, and more rights and respect for human beings on the other, has been attributed too emphatically, or too readily, to the overall process of ‘humanization’. This, in itself, results in the negation or omission of further analysis of the specific technologies of total control pursued under these regimes. In fact, while the so-called ‘human’ face of socialism marks a transition towards a seeming diminution of visible domination, it must also be recognised to constitute a significant, if hardly visible, displacement in the object of totalitarian control.

In the case of Bulgaria, this process of displacement begins around 1956, with various forms of recurrence until 1962, which marks the final clo-

sure of the labour camps, as well as the symbolic discontinuation of the outright violence and repression against individuals. Furthermore, 1962 also marks the institutionalization of the Soviet-style panel block residential arrangements, with the first buildings to be constructed in the housing complex 'Tolstoy' in Sofia. In a sense, this period of 'peaceful coexistence' reflects a very significant change - from totalitarian mobilization towards a 'disciplined' and administrative society. Was this change – from classic Stalinism to consensus and 'normalization' – one belonging to the domain of modernization and ideology? Perhaps, yet more specifically, or more directly, it was the realization of a shift within the technology of power connected to the control the everyday lives of individuals and the pursuit of a closer 'mapping' of society.

The mass construction of panel blocks was dignified as a 'cure' to the high levels of migration within the country caused by collectivization and the forced industrialization. It was also the representation of a specific path towards the modernization of the country. As such, receiving an apartment within a panel building was equated to a materialisation of success, a granting of a new social status. Nonetheless, the emergence of the panel block marks the institutionalization of a new form of 'cellular' power relations in the Bulgarian totalitarian regime, the true objective of which is the transformation of individuals into 'socialist citizens' in particular, and the transformation of the highly heterogeneous and rural Bulgarian society into one marked by discipline and homogeneity.

The hypothesis of this study is that the panel blocks, from the very beginning, were linked to specific non-discursive practices aimed at the transformation of individuals. As such, the study will not concentrate on the negative effects of totalitarian domination alone; the aim is to situate these mechanisms of power in a wider context of its possibly productive implications, which at first may seem negligible. Essentially, this means the role of the panel block, as a specific institutionalization of power relations, may at first seem

an unconventional research. Yet, as this text will show, the panel block, as a politics of space, has been made banal because it is not *seen*. Today, almost half of Bulgaria's population reside in these living arrangements, which are perhaps the most emblematic monument of the past. The architecture thus remains fixed and firm in the reality of the contemporary Bulgarian cityscape, and yet very few studies have been made regarding their histories. The analysis that is presented in this study is therefore aimed at investigating the history of this institution, with all its power relations connected to the transformation of individuals, before and after 1989.

In order to make visible the 'unseen' workings of such power relations, it is necessary to place the focus of this study on a layer of material, which has so far gathered very little attention and which seems unimportant in terms of its political, aesthetic, and social value in the history of totalitarian regimes in Eastern and Central Europe – that of architecture as a 'mode of political organization' (Foucault, 1980). In a sense, the central methodological question here is a genealogical one: "what kind of political relevance can inquiries into our past have in making intelligible the 'objective conditions' of our social present, not only in its visible crises and fissures but also in the solidity of its unquestioned rationales?" (Gordon, 1980).

On a further methodological note, the choice of Bulgaria as a case study is very significant. Due to its highly agricultural society prior to the Second World War, the 'proletarianisation' of the people pursued by the totalitarian regime through the processes of collectivization and forced industrialization had profound consequences in terms of migration, urbanization, and modernization. The transformation of the 'traditional' Bulgarian society was, in many ways, much more profound and destabilizing, when compared to other Eastern and Central European countries. Furthermore, and in connection to this, the Bulgarian regime was among the most stable within the region, where even the regime breakdown in 1989 constituted a 'palace coup' rather than a

democratic revolution. As such, the technologies of power with which this study is concerned seem to have infiltrated deepest in exactly the Bulgarian society, creating a ‘capillary’ network circulating the entire modern social body and reaching into the finest details of individual life.

Furthermore, after the fall of the totalitarian regime, the panel block institution remains largely unaltered, unlike in other countries, where initiatives have been directed towards the exterior refurbishment of these buildings. As such, the panel block is an architecture reminiscent of a time past, yet representative of the contemporary reality as well. A focus on the history of this architecture can therefore bring to light some of the most important transformations within individuals in particular, and society as a whole. In a sense, the focus on the panel block is not based on a sole interest in the past; it is also based on a profound interest in the present. Thus, approaching the history of the panel in many ways also constitutes an acute vantage point for the writing of a kind of decentred ‘history of the present’ (Foucault, 1977) in Bulgaria.

### **Building socialism and the ‘disappearance’ of the village**

When the totalitarian regime was established in Bulgaria in 1944, the country was one of the least industrialized in Eastern Europe. Months after the 9<sup>th</sup> September ‘revolution’, no more than 28% of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) members are classified as ‘proletariats’ (Знеполски, 2008). Moreover, around 80% of the population resided in villages until 1950 (Беновска-Събкова, 2009). As such, the history of the Bulgarian totalitarianism is driven by a substantial push towards the ‘proletarianisation’ of the nation by processes of collectivization and forced industrialization. As one famous party slogan from the late 1940s states: ‘we build the factory, and the factory builds us’. This constitutes a very significant dialectical relationship between the instituted path towards modernization through the *building* of ‘a socialist way of life’, fuelled by the ideological postulates of the Soviet model, and the

underlying transformation of the traditional Bulgarian society. As such, what remains hidden underneath such persistence towards ‘modernity’, described by the ‘cult leader’ Georgi Dimitrov as achieving in ‘15-20 years what other nations under different circumstances have achieved in centuries’, is a social revolution under a new system of exclusion. The acquisition of the new identity of the modern socialist citizen contains a trap: “continuity is actually a phenomenon of discontinuity, and if such archaic patterns of behaviour have survived, it is only in so far as they have been altered” (Foucault, 2009). In other words, ‘building socialism’ in Bulgaria does not constitute a linear history of a transition from a pre-modern or traditional agricultural society, as such. Rather, it is a process of a repressive disruption and subjection of predominant patterns of behaviour, cultural identities, personal histories, which remained unconnected to the totalitarian regime: in a word, building socialism in Bulgaria resulted in the ‘disappearance of the village’ in the literal sense of the word, but also as cultural origin and way of life.

Collectivization, which had been completed by the late 1950s (when more than 90% of the land was nationalized under the Labour Cooperative Agricultural Economy (TKZS) initiative), reduced the labour force involved in agriculture from “the 82.1 per cent of 1948 to 35.6 per cent” by 1960 (Crampton, 2007). This, in turn, resulted in waves of mass migration towards the cities in search for work and driven by the new dream of residing in the industrial city and participating in a ‘socialist way of live’. Therefore, the conjoined processes of collectivization and forced industrialization, successfully managed to uproot a large segment of the Bulgarian rural population and utilize its value by this transfer of labour power towards industrialization. In a census of 1946, “24.68 per cent of Bulgaria’s population has been classified as urban dwellers; by 1965 It had risen to 46.46, and by the next census in 1975 more than half of the country’s inhabitants, 57.99 per cent, were living in towns” (Crampton, 2007).

This process of artificial proletarianisation, through urbanization and industrialization, which results in an unprecedented uprooting and acculturation of large segments of the Bulgarian population is, above all else, a strategy for the consolidation of power through homogenization and re-constitution of order. In the words of James Scott (1998), such aspirations remind us of a “project of internal colonization, often glossed, as it is in imperial rhetoric, as a ‘civilizing mission’”, whose ultimate aim is the creation of ‘generic subjects’. Only by a system of exclusion of ‘the village’, as a site of heterogeneous and traditional social and cultural values, could the conceptualizations of ‘the socialist way of life’ and the ‘New Man’ reach the hegemonic status necessary for the absolute transformation of, both society at large, and the individual in particular. It is exactly the so-called ‘peasant’ that is deemed ‘asocial’, and becomes an outsider in his own homeland, excluded by a regime whose norms he is incapable of conforming to.

This process of displacing ‘the village’ and ‘the traditional’ as *Other* under the new discourse of ‘building socialism’ is clearly represented by one inhabitant of village Mustakar, interviewed during an ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the Ethnographic Institute in Sofia: “Look here, is it Mister, or is it Comrade? The Party (BCP) is everything! There is no wife, no husband, no children... She (the Party) builds my house... and placed me on a bed, as until 9<sup>th</sup> September 1944 I slept on the floor...” (Николов, 2002). This constitutes a deep identity crisis, which generates a long-lasting and deeply rooted negation of the ‘the village’ as a cultural origin. Thus, the term “villager” in the Bulgarian language becomes an inherently ambiguous connotation, which is both descriptive and normative: on the one hand, it is the description of the mere fact of village residence, while at the same time it is associative to the English word “peasant”, a term which “constantly threatened their claim to modernity” (Creed, 1998). To a foreign observer, such as is Gerald Creed, this may indeed seem an interesting nuance. However, what perhaps remains un-

spoken in this general connotation is that, in itself, village residency, no longer constituted a form of personal identification for the individual. ‘Villager’ becomes a *negative* term as a consequence of; it becomes *the Other* of the reign of totalitarianism. This results in its somewhat paradoxical realization of ‘non-being’, in which “something inside man was placed outside himself, and pushed over the edge to our horizon” (Foucault, 2009). In a word, a dominant form of social and cultural subjectivity of individuals becomes silently excluded.

This left the large amorphous mass, which migrated to the cities in the 1950s and 1960s, without “a proper point of insertion in the social space” (Foucault, 2009). Rarely have there been questions posed regarding the personal biographies of these migrants and their personal experiences of the transition to the towns and cities. Unfortunately, these events have not been the focus of major studies while they were happening. What we know for a fact, however, is that as a consequence of the mass waves of migration, there are significant processes of hybridization of the city and village cultures. According to the Bulgarian historian of communism, Ivaylo Zneposki, “the ‘new’ society, in definition, is neither rural, nor is it fully urbanized: ‘In front of us stands the portrait of a transitional time, marked by intermediate, transitional forms: neither city, nor village, neither citizens (city dwellers), nor villagers.” (Знеполски, 1980). This, in turn, realizes a very specific dichotomization in the Bulgarian individual, where s/he is caught up within the complexities of being ‘a peasant in the city’ and a ‘citizen of a village’<sup>2)</sup>. The deepening crisis of authenticity is clearly reflected in Bulgarian cinema from the 1970s<sup>3)</sup>, which is concerned specifically with the processes of migration and urbanization. For example, films such as ‘*Последно лято* [*The Last Summer*’, or ‘*Дърво без корен* [*Rootless Tree*’], which were directed by Hristo Hristov, are concerned with dramatizing the deep feeling of nostalgia for the lost paradise of the village felt by a large segment of the migrant population. In ‘*Дърво*



*без корен [Rootless Tree]*’, the main character represents a ‘peasant’, who is cut off from his rural environment and is shown to be completely incapable of adapting to the conditions of modern city life. More importantly, films such as *‘Селянин с колело [Peasant with a bicycle]’* pursue this question of adaptation even further – the main character is shown to breed pigs outside of his newly built apartment block.

Essentially, what such representations of the consequences of migration show is that while the totalitarian regime may have ultimately been successful in the destruction of ‘the village’ as a social and cultural identity and, as such, in the social transformation of ‘the villager’ as a ‘non-being’, it was seemingly unable to completely alter the behaviour of the given individuals. This may, at first, seem an insignificant detail, yet it is one of great importance. Let me clarify: the ‘possibilities of personhood’ (Hacking, 2002) were significantly altered under the discourse of ‘building socialism’ and the push for modernization, in the sense that it became impossible to dissociate ‘villager’ from ‘peasant’ and as such, to dissociate it from its constantly threatened claim to modernity; in a word, to be ‘a villager’, as a positive form of subjectivity, was destroyed – it only retained meaning as *an Other* to the ‘modern socialist individual’. However, even though the space of ‘possibilities of personhood’ is altered by this system of exclusion, it is confined by a rigorously negative manner – the absolute abolition of ‘tradition’. In other words, the main consequence of forced industrialization and urbanization in the context of Bulgaria in the 1950s and early 1960s is a displacement, a constitution of a ‘void’ in realm of individual subjectivity. As such, the large segments of rural migrants are transformed into a homogenous mass of alienated, atomized, and amorphous ‘proletariats’, which lacks a fixed point of insertion in the social body. Only thus is it possible to clearly understand the deep tensions in the processes of urban adaptation and breaking with ‘the past’ as a cultural heritage of forms of behaviour, habits, and mentalities.

It is within this context that the institutionalization of the panel block system of residence takes a central place. Faced with this new ‘unchained danger’ (Foucault, 2009), the regime reacts by relating this strategy of construction to the ideal of *building socialism* – i.e. the establishment of apartment blocks became the new institution aimed at the “fulfilment of the “material and spiritual needs” (Стойчев, 1976) of the new ‘socialist individual’ in particular, and the nation in general. With the measures taken from 1962, the year during which the construction of the first panel block housing complex onwards had begun, an entire social space is reconstituted, which allowed this negated subjectivity of ‘the villager’ to find a new, fixed place. Therefore, while this transformation of the living arrangements in Bulgaria tends to be regarded as a reaction to the growing housing deficit through the use of a Soviet-model of construction, there lies a much deeper technology of power within it. The panel block was a structure of therapeutic value, an ‘agent of cure’ of sorts (Foucault, 2003), constituted by a ‘caged’ freedom, a sense of semi-liberty, which had, as its main function, the ultimate transformation of the modern Bulgarian individual and the reconstruction of the ‘void’ created by the ‘disappearance of the village’. The blocks are therefore not an emblem of the slow progress of modernization or the ‘humanization’ of the totalitarian regime; they are an emblem of a “double movement of liberation and enslavement” (Foucault, 2009), which translates into the reality of a constrained, fixed, and organized form of freedom for its inhabitants.

Thus, the ‘socialist citizen’, in both the juridical and social sense of the word, becomes objectified. The fissure, or trauma, constituted by the ‘death of the village’ and the problems of urban adaptation are reorganized in such a way that that negation of ‘villager’ as a non-being is finally subsumed in the overall progress of ‘building socialism’. The constructed panel block residences represent a space of productive power to that overall system of exclusion: this space can be regarded as becoming a *milieu* of ‘modernity’, where the

now-unified society “could recognise itself and put its own values into circulation” (Foucault, 2009). The ‘disappearance of the village’ had been finalized, and in its place stand the strange, bizarre, and foreign silhouettes of a future, planned; a present, redefined; and a past that can never be reconstituted.

### **The politics of space**

As was shown in the last part, the institutionalization of the panel block housing arrangement in Bulgaria is connected to a very specific form of power relations aimed at the objectification and ultimate transformation of individuals. Before we continue however, it is helpful to quantify the actual influx of immigrants into the large urban centres of the country: in Sofia, the population had risen from a more than 360,000 people in 1946, to almost 900,000 in 1965, and to a little under one million in 1975. The rise in numbers is similar in the second biggest city of Plovdiv: from over 125,000 in 1946, to almost 230,000 in 1965, and almost 300,000 in 1975; similar trends figure for other large urban centres (Table 1). This testifies to the scope of transformation in the Bulgarian society, as mentioned above, and contextualizes the centrality of the institutionalization of the panel block for the fixation and ‘disciplinization’ of the population.

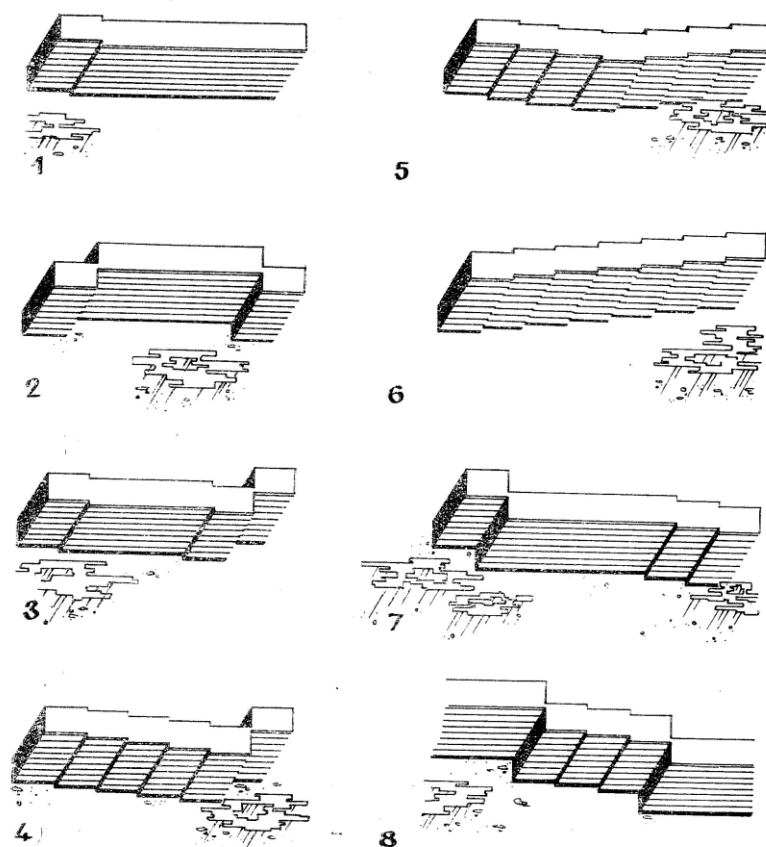
Consequently, according to official Party statistics, by the end of 1985, there are 3,160,000 homes/housing arrangements, of which around 75% (or more than 2,300,000) were constructed after 9<sup>th</sup> September 1944. “Around 950 000 of these, including around 490 000 panel blocks are constructed in the period 1971-1985” (Тричков et al., 1988). According to sources from the media, the first panel blocks to be built in Sofia were finalized in the neighbourhood ‘Tolstoy’ in 1963.<sup>4)</sup> Another newspaper, the daily *Dnevnik*,<sup>5)</sup> reported in 2002 that there are around 300,000 panel blocks in the city, while the panel block residences of ‘Mladost’, ‘Liulin’, ‘Tolstoy’, ‘Druzhiba’, ‘Obelia’,

and others constitute no less than 26% of the capital's territory. The situation is comparable in the other major urban centres outlined in Table 1, where the panel block is also the main architectural representation of peoples' living arrangement and private space. This data single-handedly illustrates the scale of the institutionalization of the panel block and its firm 'cementation' in the reality of Bulgaria. Essentially, while this institution constitutes a direct response to the increasing housing shortages in a period of 'normalization' in the Bulgarian totalitarian regime, it must also be recognised as a process connected to a specific mechanism of power aimed at the reconstitution of multiplicities through the distribution of individuals in a disciplinary space.

**Table 1.** Population growth in major urban centres 1946-2001

Cities/Years	Population size							Index	
	1946	1956	1965	1975	1985	1992	2001	1946	2001
Burgas	44 449	72 526	106 115	152 089	188 066	195 686	193 316	100	435
Varna	76 954	120 345	180 110	252 525	302 841	302 432	314 539	100	407
Stara Zagora	37 230	56 177	86 621	122 277	150 302	150 518	143 989	100	381
Sofia	366 801	592 845	886 554	990 273	1 220 925	1 114 925	1 096 386	100	326
Dobritch	30 522	42 661	55 150	86 446	109 142	104 485	100 379	100	325
Pleven	39 058	57 555	78 666	107 609	129 654	130 812	122 149	100	313
Ruse	53 523	87 584	128 888	159 578	185 440	170 038	162 128	100	303
Sliven	34 291	46 175	68 384	90 803	102 105	106 212	100 695	100	297
Plovdiv	126 563	161 836	229 043	299 638	342 050	341 056	340 638	100	269

Source: Кираджиев, 2001

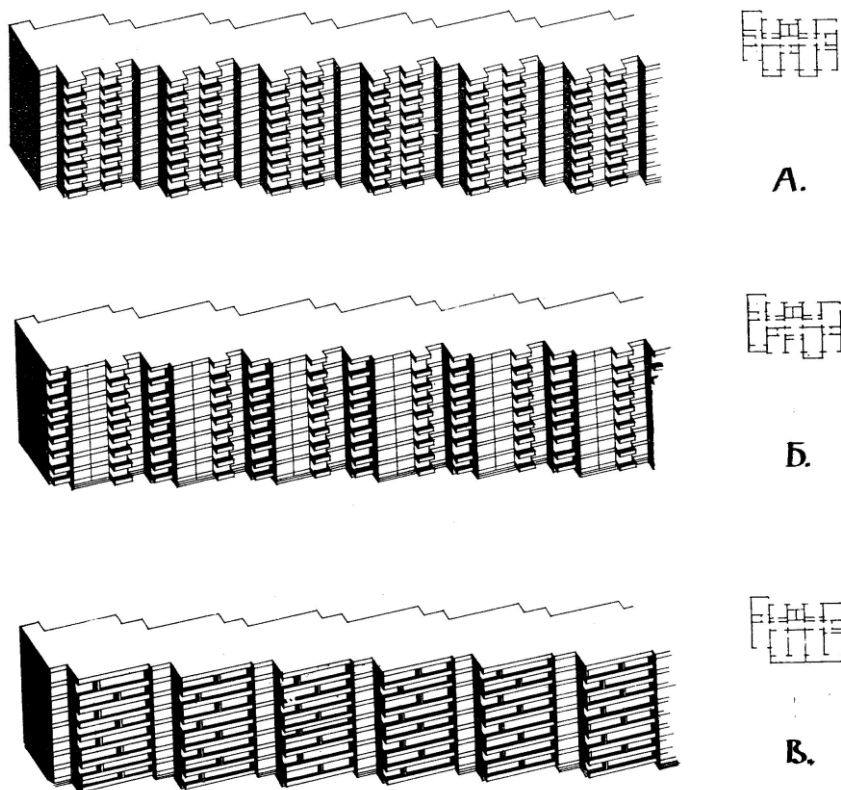


**Fig. 1.** Selected typologies of panel blocks (Атанасов et al., 1968)

The panel block building is constituted by prefabricated concrete panels (Figs 1 and 2). The typical architectural representations of this housing arrangement in the context of Bulgaria are buildings containing 5-8 floors, with between 2 to 3 apartments per floor (Fig. 3). In the 1960s, their construction began with 2-bedroom apartments ranging in size between 56 – 64 sq. m. In the next decade, a slightly different design was incorporated: buildings consisting of 3-bedroom apartments reaching up to 80-90 sq. m. (Иванова, 2006). Within this highly constrained space, the traditional housing arrangement of the individual and the family were significantly altered to meet the utilitarian-

aesthetic needs of the ‘modern socialist individual’: several ‘corridor’ spaces separate the social spheres of ‘kitchen’, ‘living area’, ‘master bedroom’, and ‘(children’s’) bedroom’ (Fig. 4). The kitchen is no larger than 6-7 sq. m., which in turn makes the fitting in of a dining table a practical impossibility, i.e. this becomes a space specifically dedicated to the realm of the ‘hidden’ and dirty housework. On the other hand, the most representative room of the apartment becomes the living area, with an average size of 20 sq. m., which is distanced from the kitchen and dedicated to the fulfilment of the social and leisure needs of the totality of its inhabitants.

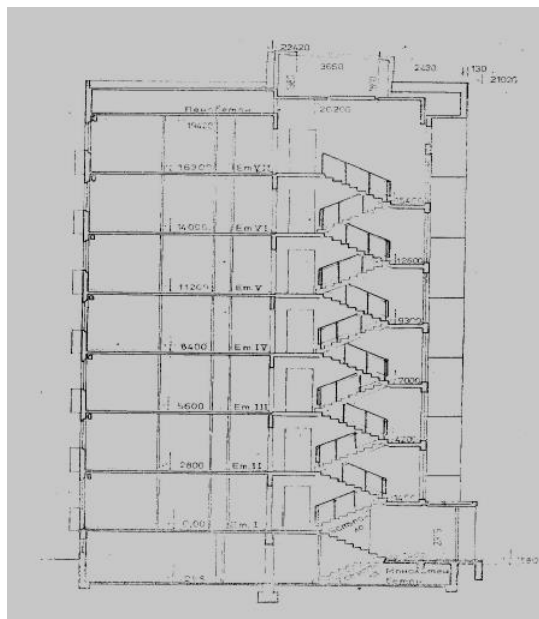
The imposition of a ‘foreign’ reconstitution of the housing arrangement in the panel block represented a clear disruption of the Bulgarian housing tradition. For example, in the interior design of the traditional Bulgarian house, several spaces are of central importance to the psychological constitution of a ‘home’. Perhaps one of the most important of these spaces is called *kushta*, which represents the architectural representation of a kitchen area, living area, and ‘guest house’ (Николов, 2003). This displacement of spaces realizes a continuation of the ‘disappearance’ of the village, as the technology of exclusion of traditional forms of life, into the private sphere. In other words, the panel block finalizes the negation of pre-socialist forms of cultural and social identifications of individuals. Furthermore, as the main inhabitants of these apartments were young people and families coming from the rural areas, life in the panel block created a clear break with their cultural heritage. Such a break with the past constituted an artificial ‘memory loss’ of the new inhabitants, who, as new members of the urban culture, were caught up in a learning process revolving around “how to be an urban dweller and citizen of the modern nation” (Златкова, 2003).



**Fig. 2.** Representations of 8-floor panel blocks (Атанасов et al., 1968)

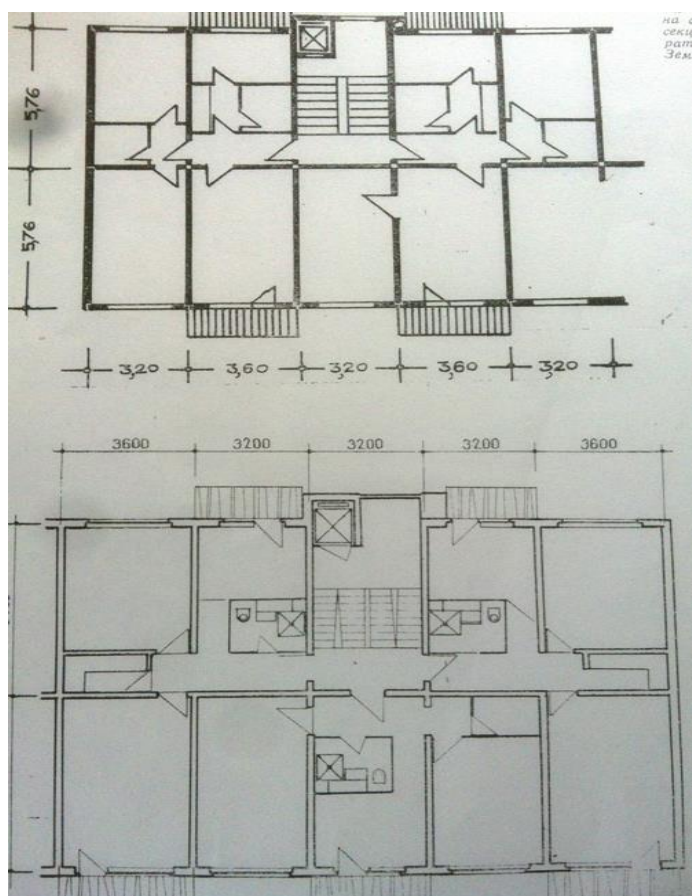
As one inhabitant of village Sladun, who recollects the financing of a panel apartment ‘for the young in city’, says in an interview: ‘I went to the city (Sofia) to be with my son and my daughter-in-law. A block in Mladost they call it. I ask, are there no old people here, so that it is called Mladost?’<sup>(6)</sup> But a building – the whole village can fit inside ... and there will still be some space left. They live on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor. More or less in the skies. But there is a bathroom in the building... So there is, and yet there is no one there to ask for a pinch of salt... We are new – they say – we don’t know our neighbours. And if this is a *jivelishte*<sup>(7)</sup> - then say health to it!<sup>(8)</sup>’ (Николов, 2003). Here, *jivelishte* is more than the architectural framework of the home, surrounding the functional needs of life; it is a spiritual space, connected to a given system of culture and reflexive of the mentalities of its inhabitants. It is a habitus, a life-world of social identities and behavioural patterns deeply engrained in the

Bulgarian culture. In absolute contradistinction to this, the panel apartment constitutes a sphere aimed at the ‘silencing’ of the past and the subsequent transformation of its inhabitants through the reconstitution of the functioning of their everyday lives. In short, the apartment is a constitution of an ‘anti-home’ space. The inhabitants enter a foreign and constrained space of private life, in which they ought to truly modernize and transform themselves in ‘modern socialist citizens’. In other words, this ‘anti-home’, is a sphere of ‘encapsulation’ within this homogenizing architecture, which aims to impose a particular conduct on the society by the distribution of bodies within ‘a confined space’ (Deleuze, 1995).



**Fig. 3.** Vertical representation of a block in ‘Tolstoy’ neighbourhood (Митев, 1985)





**Fig. 4.** Constructive representation of apartment (Стойчев, 1976)

To become this ‘socialist citizen’ in the modern society is as much a responsibly - of adapting and altering oneself to the modern society – as it is a *right*. A right which everyone willing to move to the city and ‘enlighten’ oneself is granted: that right, plain and simple, is the right to around 15 square meters of space within a panel apartment. The communist ideal of social equality finds its realization in the architecture of the panel block. However, the transformation into the ‘socialist citizen’, through the architecture of the panel block, is also constitutive of a certain position of privilege, or status (Дичев, 2003). The accession to the city under the Bulgarian totalitarian regime was a ‘civilizing’ process of sorts for individuals, who could only be recognised as legal citizens if they had secured a housing arrangement. Thus,

the inhabitation of panel block apartments signified a symbolic ‘confraternity’ of people whose acquisition of a place in the city dwellings established a “ritualistic union” (Weber, 1981) of interdependence with each other, but more importantly – with the regime. This constitutes a very interesting phenomenon because the architectural enclosure of the private becomes the main constituent of the individual’s public status as citizen. In a general sense, the panel apartment was the most important materialization of success as the integration of human beings into the ‘modern life’ of the socialist city.

Ultimately, this translates in a re-qualification of the person into a *juridical* subject, who is “caught up in the fundamental interests of the social pact” (Foucault, 1977), and who has been *granted* a certain semi-liberty through the institution of the panel block. Here, semi-liberty is equated to a certain aspect of normalization: “Man in Communist society is free in a sense in which he is *not* free in the concentration camp” (Zinoviev, 1984). In other words, there is a certain leeway, a caged-freedom, allowing individuals to arrange their lives as best as they can *within the given framework*. However; and perhaps more directly, the institution of the panel block also translates in a tactic of discipline, whose ultimate objective is the production of obedient subjects. As noted above, the architecture of the panel serves a powerful play of forces of domination, which seek to alter human behaviour. As such, it becomes visible how the panel block functions to institutionalize an obedient subject, “the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, an authority that is exercised continually around him and upon him, which he must allow to function automatically in him” (Foucault, 1977).

Within this conflict transformation of the individual as *both* a juridical *and* an obedient subject, the ‘citizen’ becomes a term hollowed out to a strictly administrative essence. This is very important because it creates a certain hierarchy in the Soviet-style totalitarian regimes, which is rarely acknowledged: the difference between ‘citizen’ and ‘comrade’. As Кираджиев (2001)

notes, “under totalitarianism the Bulgarian society is separated between party (BCP, BZNS)<sup>9</sup>) members and non-party citizens with a row of benefits reserved for the former,” In other words, the ‘citizen’ lacks a political identity. As noted above, one’s ‘rights’ are reserved to a given space, while one’s privileges centre around the physical presence in a city and the participation in ‘modern life’.

Thus, the panel block constitutes a politics of space engraved by a dual process of enslavement and the granting of a certain restrained or organized freedom. For a large part of the population this was considered freedom enough. Thus, the essence of this mechanism of power is not the traditional conception of totalitarianism, as total domination imposed from “from above” (*cf.* Arendt, 1986). Rather, its essence lies in the “population’s acceptance to its freedom and its reproduction of these limits in the normal process of its own life” (Zinoviev, 1984). In a word, the totalitarian regime managed to ‘build’ or produce the citizens, which it required: human beings only capable of retaining this positive subjectivity within a society of this type – “from the day he is born the individual in Communist society is subject to powerful formative influences, which, with few exceptions, turn him into a ‘new man’ in accordance with the principles of that society” (Zinoviev, 1984). Thus, the main functions of power relations in this later period of totalitarianism function not only as a power to say ‘no’, or as an overall technology of domination as repression and exclusion. Rather, power springs from the bottom up, from the finest details of social life itself; it becomes a capillary network sustaining the regime and the life of the social body itself. As Vaclav Havel (1988) noted in his essay ‘Stories and Totalitarianism’: “the advanced totalitarian system depends on manipulator devices so refined, complex, and powerful that it no longer needs murderers and victims”.

Thus, contrary to Hanna Arendt’s (1986) central argument in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, the centrality of power lies not in the constitution of a

system in which individuals are made ‘superfluous’, but in a specific mechanism of power centred on the distribution of bodies in space, in which “each individual has his own place; and each place has its individual” (Foucault, 1977). It is a form of ‘cellular’ power, in which the ‘cells’ of individual existence, constructed within the panel blocks, provide the link between the part and the whole. They serve, as noted above, to characterize the individual both in his private and his public being. This, in turn, conditions, orders, and fixes a given heterogeneous multiplicity, which had been ‘roaming around’ as a consequence of the processes of collectivization and the nationalization of the land, and serves to integrate that multiplicity in the homogeneity of the ‘modern socialist society’.

The panel block thus constitutes a very important institutionalization of a specific politics of space in Bulgaria – it simultaneously negates a pre-existing tradition of everyday life of individuals and it disciplines them in the utter rearrangement of their behaviour and habits. Thus, by the late 1970s, with the national institutionalization of this form of living arrangement, the ‘socialist citizen’ becomes an entity that can be constructed or *made*. This reflects a development of a specific politics of space, similar to the one exemplified by Michel Foucault (1977) in *Discipline and Punish*:

[A] whole problematic then develops: that of an architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen... or to observe the external space... but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control – to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them (p. 172).

In short, panels can make human beings ‘knowable’ and docile. There is no doubt that the ‘socialist citizen’ is no more than the “fictitious atom of an ideological representation of society” (Foucault, 1977). However, with the institutionalization of the panel block it becomes visible, moreover - it becomes *knowable*, how, through a specific form of a politics of space as a mechanism of domination, this particular fiction becomes engrained in the Bulgarian reality. Similar forces are at work in the creation of docile bodies in the late 18<sup>th</sup> c. when the soldier has become something that can be made; *out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed*; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, *turning silently into the automatism of habit*; in short, *one has ‘got rid of the peasant’* and given ‘the air of a soldier’ (ordinance of 20 March 1764, cited in Foucault, 1977).

Rather than the constitution of ‘a soldier’, the peasant is substituted by a new kind of individual, devoid of a political identity, yet implanted with deep rules of social coordination – the ‘socialist citizen’. The ‘machine’, which carries out this transformation of the inapt body, is the politics of space pursued within the architecture of the panel blocks. In short, the panels represent an institutionalization of a ‘micro-physics’ of the overall system of domination pursued under the totalitarian regime.

The panel block serves as kind of ‘microcosm’ of the perfect society, as envisioned by the totalitarian regime. It is the vision of a society in which “individuals are isolated in their moral existence, but in which they come together in a strict hierarchical framework, with no lateral relation, communication being possible only in a vertical direction” (Foucault, 1977). When thinking about the panel block, with its vertical architectural manifestations (Fig. 3) and its insulation of individuals in confined cellular spaces (Fig. 4), it is possible to make visible the actual workings of power relations in the entire

totalitarian society. In a word, the panel block is a social institution of, and a symbolic synecdoche for, an entire politics of space and a system of domination. In order to substantiate this point, it is perhaps most helpful to magnify this analysis to a kind of ‘cartography’ of the social and biographical constitution of an actual panel block built in the neighbourhood ‘Mladost 1’ in Sofia (Figs. 5 and 6).



**Fig. 5.** Side view of Block n. 52, ent. 3, Mladost 1

In an ethnographic study performed in 2003, an article entitled ‘Socialism – Reality without Illusions’ written by Ivan Nikolov (2003) investigates the personal genealogies of the inhabitants of block no. 52, entrance 3. According to data gathered in that study, 18 families, of which only two are classified as ‘second-generation’ Sofia citizens, inhabit the building. These two families had been ‘granted’ their apartments as a consequence of the destruction of their luxurious, pre-socialist built family houses in central Sofia. The remaining 16 families are of a rural origin with a diverse geography and are classified as ‘first generation citizens’. Some of the interviewees even admit to

being “first generation citizens with shoes” (Николов, 2003). For them, as noted in the first part of this study, the process of the exclusion of the village is deeply felt and they consider rural, agricultural life a neglected sphere reserved for those incapable of adapting to a ‘modern way of life’. More importantly, the study represents how the panel block, as the random assimilation of a group of people ‘under the same roof’ in a confined space, has constituted its own rules and habits of communication and life. For example, the study exemplifies a particular ‘event’ in the inner block relations between two neighbours who live on the first and sixth floors. These two women, nicknamed “the Morse code” would perform a regular ‘ritual’ of communication: “a repeated knocking of the central heating pipes was a sign to prepare of one of the two neighbours to prepare for the daily routing of coffee drinking” (Николов, 2003). This is one among many interesting illustrations of the ‘panel life’. The reason that so much space has been given to this particular study is very simple: it represents an example of the *actual* and self-consciously recognised traits in the everyday life of the panel block. It concretely links the theory with the practice by presenting a singular genealogical account of the significant changes, which have occurred in block no. 52 over the years. Unfortunately, this is one of very few studies concerned with the subject, leaving the ‘life in the panel’ a highly unexplored layer of the social life in Bulgaria, before 1989. Yet as has been shown above, the panel block institution is central to the functions of power relations under the totalitarian regime and requires much further analysis than is currently offered. Nonetheless, what remains even less documented is the undisturbed continuation of this institution and its function as the predominant housing arrangement in the country after the fall of the regime. Exactly this institutional continuity within the general ‘transitional’ history of Bulgaria will be the focus of the next sections.



**Fig. 6.** Rear view of Block n. 52, ent. 3, Mladost 1

### **Contextualizing the 1989 revolutions**

The fall of the totalitarian regimes in Eastern and Central Europe are events, which in many ways reconstituted the central question of modern philosophy: ‘What is Enlightenment?’ in a contemporary historical context. In November 1784, Kant provided perhaps the best-known interrogation of this problematic in his response to the question: *Was ist Aufklärung?*, published in the German periodical *Berlinische Monatschrift*. More than two hundred years later, the post-socialist revolutions provide a similar context for philosophical reflection of the progression to ‘enlightenment’ as “man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity” (Kant, 1991). Accordingly, it can be argued that the revolutions were a ‘threshold’ in the reconstitution of Eastern and Central European countries on the path towards ‘unfinished project of modernity’ (Habermas, 1996).

According to Habermas (1990), while countries such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania experienced very different revolutionary changes, what is visible underneath these various guises, is that



these events all followed a general pattern and thus formed a process of a singular revolution: one in which the world is, in a sense, turning backwards, allowing these countries to catch up with time and the developments missed out. What is distinguishing in these countries, for Habermas, is that the totalitarian regimes were not instituted by a successful and independent revolution, but were the direct consequence of the Second World War and the occupation of the Red Army. As such, “the abolition of the people’s republic has occurred under the sign of a return to old, national symbols, and, where this was possible, has understood itself to be the continuation of the political traditions and party organizations of the interwar years” (Habermas, 1990). These revolutionary events represent the reflexive desire of the people “to connect up constitutionally with the inheritance of the bourgeois revolutions, and socially and politically with the styles of commerce and life associated with developed capitalism, particularly that of the European Community” (ibid.). Thus, these ‘rectifying’ revolutions are recognised as a ‘return to history’ (Glenny, 1992), where this history belongs to a certain epoch of the world: the era of the French Revolution and the age of ‘enlightenment’:

[I]n Central Europe and East Germany, it had become increasingly evident that, in the words of a well-known formulation, those below were no longer willing, and those above were no longer able, to go on in the old way. It was mass anger (and not just that of a handful of imported provocateurs) that was directed at the apparatuses of state security, just as it had once been directed at the Bastille (Habermas, 1990).

This analysis stays true to Kantian project of modernity by ascribing a normative definition of these changes in the overall context of a transition of a people from a stage of immaturity to a status of ‘adulthood’. Such an outlook holds an inherently prescriptive outlook of history by situating “contemporary

reality with respect to the overall movement and its basic directions” (Foucault, 1984). In other words, the ‘present’ of the post-totalitarian revolutions is placed in line with: for one, a past that is to be revived; a present made intelligible according to signs heralding towards a certain direction; and a future, which ought to be realized accordingly.

Where this subtle perception of 1989 as a ‘dawning’ of an accomplishment may have seemed considerably illustrative with regards to the types of revolutionary changes occurring in Poland, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia, the case of the Bulgarian revolution has a reality of its own. In the words of Richard Crampton, “Zhivkov’s fall<sup>10</sup>) was the work of the party hierarchy; it was a palace coup rather than a revolution, and ‘people power’ in Bulgaria was to be more the consequence than the cause of the change of leadership’ (Crampton, 2005). Thus, what the case of Bulgaria presents is a reconstitution of the answer to ‘What is Enlightenment?’ in an entirely negative way, i.e. ‘enlightenment’ only meant the discontinuation of the self-imposed tutelage; an *ausgang* as exit and way out. In other words, while the revolution successfully tore down the oppressive regime, it was in no way a reflection or realization of a true reform in the ‘modes of thought’. As such, the fall of totalitarianism in Bulgaria had consequences for the transformation of the social and political existence of the people, which were qualitatively different from the other countries in transition. There, ‘freedom’, in the most general sense of the word, was assured in a purely negative manner, i.e. as “the absence of any challenge to it” (Foucault, 1984), which is of a different nature than the freedom gained in the process of ‘enlightenment’ defined by Kant (1991), as the realization of an individual’s public use of reason. As one of the most famous Bulgarian songs during the transition goes: ‘grant me a divorce and don’t torture me any longer; take your panel blocks and the Trabant, but let me keep my air.’<sup>11</sup>) This constitutes a very particular psychological relationship of the Bulgarian individual to the end of the totalitarian regime – it is a divorce *given*

to the people from the old forms of oppression and path towards modernization. Yet, the essence of this discontinuation is, pure and simple, the re-establishment of personal liberty and the opportunity to lead one's own life. This is clearly illustrated in the first verse of the song:

I am sitting with you on a round table,  
In a small neighbourhood café,  
Member of the party of the people,  
While I – of the UDF

But this is not the problem,  
And my reason for a divorce,  
I simply no longer have the time,  
I have only half a life left

Consequently, this relationship of the individual to modernity, and to the freedom granted through enlightenment, represents a closer proximity to Baudelaire than to Kant. Modern man is, for Baudelaire, “not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself” (Foucault, 1984). This modernity then, is not the process of resuming that ‘unfinished project’ of which Habermas is speaking; rather, it is the emergence of the self-imposed immaturity as the ephemeral task of the transformation of the self. Accordingly, Дайнов & Гарнизов (1997): “in Bulgaria, the signs of modernity are clearly visible, yet modernity, as such, is still not existent.” As such, ‘enlightenment’ has a somewhat different meaning here: it is not the continuation of a ‘project’ towards modernity through a rekindling of a certain historical trajectory; enlightenment must rather be regarded as an attitude, a philosophical ethos concerned with “a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to

recognise ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying” (Foucault, 1984). The Bulgarian revolution, when looked through this slightly de-centred lens, then, becomes an event, on the one hand inaugurating a recognition of these limits to the ‘possibilities of personhood’ as the consciousness Bulgarian individuals contain of themselves and of their past and, on the other, necessitating a form of critique into the ways of “no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think” (Foucault, 1984).

Therefore this ‘man’, described for us in the song, in whose liberation we are invited to participate, “is already in himself the effect of a subjectation much more profound than himself” (Foucault, 1977). As discussed in the previous section, the modern Bulgarian individual is, to a great extent, an entity transformed by the institutionalization of the architecture of the panel block. It is no coincidence therefore, that the panel block figures in the song as that ‘thing’ of the past, which, along with the Trabant, is so willingly and readily left behind. The liberation from that caged freedom, which was the ‘soul’ of the socialist citizen, constitutes the true essence of the Bulgarian post-communist revolution. Nonetheless, this requires a change, which is more difficult than may seem at first. The transformation of the behaviour and everyday lives of individuals has been so deep, that many had grown to like it; moreover, the problem evolves in certain incapacity to pursue one’s full personal freedom due to the simple fact that s/he had never been allowed to do so before. Thus, the revolution of Bulgaria seems an event representing on the one hand, a certain discontinuity with the past and a contradiction of the old forms of subjectivities; and on the other, a silent continuity of the everyday lives of individuals. As such, the blocks still remain, in the peripheries of the cities, still reminiscent of a time passed, yet visually signifying a new representation, a façade of the contemporary Bulgarian reality. While ‘stripped off’ from the system of domination with which they were directly associated under

the regime, these structures remain ‘a microcosm’ of society and are a clear reflection of the Bulgarian contemporaneity.

### **Today, as ‘difference in history’**

The last part of the study, which may at first hand have seemed as a philosophical digression from the main purpose, was an essential prerequisite to the continuation of the analysis of the historical constitution of subjectivities in the context of Bulgaria. From it, we get a clearer understanding of the ‘present’ as a dichotomous conflict: in which, on the one hand individuals remain, to a large extent, trapped in their own history, and their attempts into the possibilities of transgressing it. This is a rather complex process, which nonetheless can become visible through a focus on the panel block as a ‘microcosm’ of the contemporary life in Bulgaria. As such, this section of the study returns to a more empirical basis of the investigation as a means of re-constituting the vital relationship between theory and practice, which can be more concretely, or more directly, linked to the present situation. According to Foucault (1982), there are “two meanings of the word ‘subject’: subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge.” Whereas the previous sections were centred more specifically on this first formation of the ‘subject’ as the transformation of the individual into the ‘socialist citizen’ through a definitive politics of space and a mechanism of cellular power, what the fall of the regime and the transition to post-communism constituted, as noted above, was a different relation of the individual to himself/herself as process of self-transformation fuelled by the process of ‘enlightenment’. This can be clearly illustrated in the changing nature of the panel blocks in the Bulgarian post-socialist society.

**Table 2.** Shares of housing ownership per country

[%]	Private ownership	Private rental	Public Rental	Housing Co-operative	Other
Bulgaria	97	-	3	-	-
Czech Republic	47	16	16	17	3
Poland	55	-	12	29	4
Slovakia	55	-	4	12	29*
*This mainly includes combined ownership					

In 2012, the panel block remains the dominant housing arrangement in the country. In Sofia, approximately 40% of the population (around 1,200,000) lives in such apartments, which are now constituted as their private property. After the fall of the regime, those, who were not the legal owners of the apartments which they inhabited, were allowed to have these right transferred to them by purchasing those apartments. Consequently, by 2003, Bulgaria can be shown to have one of the highest levels of housing ownership, not just in Eastern and Central Europe, but also in Europe as a whole – 97% (Table 2). However, unlike other countries where the architecture of the panel block is also present, in Bulgaria, there has been no official policy stand regarding neither the communal nor the individual renovation of apartments. Only in 2007, through the initiative of the United Nations Development Programme, did the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW) begin funding the renovation of panel blocks. Even so, by 2011, there have been only 50 buildings, which have been refurbished;<sup>12)</sup> this stands in stark contrast to other Eastern and Central European countries. For example, in the capital of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava, such initiatives have been much more deeply implemented. As a result, the cityscape of the city is significantly altered in terms of the large numbers of exterior renovations of panel blocks. In Bulgaria, on the other hand, the exterior representation of these buildings remains largely unchanged, and as such bears the mark of the

fallen regime, with the sole exceptions individual renovations, which were the direct result of piecemeal, individual initiatives from homeowners.



**Fig. 7.** A mosaic of glazed-in balconies, Block no. 45, Mladost 1



**Fig. 8.** Block 45, entrances 2-5, Mladost 14



**Fig. 9.** Block no. 51, Mladost 1

This, in turn, makes it possible to visualize and differentiate the unique Bulgarian phenomenon of the closed-in or ‘glazed balcony’ (Figs. 7-9). This is the most distinguishable transformation of the architecture of the panel block, a process that however, had begun before the fall of the regime. For example in block 52 in ‘Mladost 1’ (Fig. 6), the internal reorganization of the apartments through the gained space of the glazed balcony was a process dating back to the late 1980s. In that block, one inhabitant had transformed his balcony and re-situated his bedroom in its place; while in another apartment, the balcony was transformed into a ‘study’ (Николов, 2003). While in some



cases, the enclosure of the balcony results in miniaturized ‘greenhouses’ or an improvised storage room, it is most widely functionalized in the enlargement of the living room and kitchen. Speaking specifically of the kitchen (Fig. 10), this process entirely transforms that space from a kitchen, in the functional sense for which it was initially build, into a small ‘dining’ room of sorts. Clearly, this is more than a change in the functional needs of its inhabitants. The glazed balcony and the interior reorganization within the panel apartments as a whole, represents a deep process of fragmentation between the overarching vision of the ‘socialist citizen’ for which the panel block was initially institutionalized, and the actual inhabitants of these apartments. Even though there were strict policies against the interior or exterior alteration of the panel blocks before 1989, such instances show a clear break in the authoritative hold over individuals in the last years of the regime. In short, individuals are no longer objectified by the panel block, as the architecture could no longer control their everyday lives in the same way; it had lost its power to provide a hold on their conduct. In many ways, these processes are directly connected to the slow erosion of the regime legitimacy. Such acts of private initiative attempting to ‘hollow out’ the control over their lives signify to the fact that while the block, and totalitarianism in general, were successful to large extents in dominating a majority of the population, they never managed to fully transform society.

Now, what changed, in the post-socialist context, was the scale and meaning of the processes of interior refurbishment of the apartment (Figs. 7-9). Before 1989, these were fragmented and ‘hidden’ processes aimed at the alteration of the private sphere; after the revolution, these were the visual representation of status and a sign of individuality. In a sense, through these transformations the individual is ‘producing’ himself/herself as an experiment with the possibilities of transgressing the limits that are imposed on them. Thus, the structure of the panel block continues to represent architecture of

power relations and a specific politics of space: despite the fall of the totalitarian regime, it still “categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity” (Foucault, 1982) and, as such, continues to participate in the transformation of that individual. What has changed is the process through which this is happening. The apartment is no longer that ‘anti-home’ as the invisible authority over the everyday lives of individuals; rather, it becomes that space through which its inhabitants, now owners, are invited to recognise themselves in – it ties the individual to “his own identity by a consciousness or self-knowledge” (ibid.). As such, in the post-socialist context, the external mosaic re-constitution of the panel block (Fig. 7) is a sign of social heterogeneity. What can be clearly distinguished from the picture is that the enclosed balcony becomes one of the most important architectural representations of social inequality. We can see the glazed balconies of the past with their glass concealment, balconies left unaltered altogether, and an array of different materials and colours used in the full enclosure of that space. As such, the panel apartment remains a materialized form of status and success, as it did during the regime. However, what did change after 1989 is the increasing hierarchization of material success, which is clearly reflected within the realm of the everyday lives of individuals.

The transition to post-socialism meant that heterogeneity of society and atomization of its citizens, which remained ‘unseen’ during the totalitarian regime, would come to the forefront - and that is what is clearly visible today through the panel blocks. The transition also meant that the reconstitution of individuals into democratic citizens was not an automatic process achieved as a direct consequence of the fall of the totalitarian regime. This transformation could not be one directed from above, as for example according to the normative principles of the project of modernity. It can only be a change which each would have to bring about within themselves, as Kant had envisioned the ‘way out’ of immaturity. This ‘way out’ constitutes much more

than the transition away from totalitarianism and towards democracy: it has to be a process interiorized within individuals.



**Fig. 10.** Glazed balcony, turned into a kitchen in the neighbourhood ‘Obelia’

This interiorization is clearly reflected in the changing nature of the panel block: while the ‘mosaic’ exterior, which can be noticed in a majority of panel blocks nowadays, speaks of aesthetic displeasure, energy inefficiency, and individual disregard of ‘the common’, it also speaks of something much more important – it is an attempt at clearly demarcating the present from the past; it is a protracted effort of significantly altering a structure of the past; it is an individualized attempt at reconstructing that foreign space aimed at the imposition of a particular conduct. In a word, it brings to light an aspect of the personal revolutions within the everyday lives of individuals. Panels no longer form a structure in which “something inside man was placed outside himself,

and pushed over the edge to our horizon” (Foucault, 2009); rather they become the main object through which individuals are able to recognize themselves in the present, by altering the past. The panel block thus introduces a very distinctive representation of change in contemporary Bulgaria: it shows that despite the official end of totalitarianism and the inauguration of the process of democratization, the equivalent discontinuity within the everyday lives of individuals is much more subtle, difficult, and prolonged. Thus, the panel provides an interesting vantage point through which to be able to investigate some of the underlying differences and transformations within society as a whole, but more specifically, within individuals in particular. Yet, this remains an area of study, which requires much deeper investigation. As such, the main aim of this study has been to make visible a layer of material, which until now has been of very little value in the analysis of the transformation of individuals in Bulgaria. In a sense, an entire history remains to be written of such politics of space, and this study presents a potential for the realization of such a project in future.

### **Conclusion**

The study presented here can be defined as a decentred ‘history of the present’ in Bulgaria, which means that it is essentially a genealogical question. In other words, it has attempted to investigate the relevance of the past in making some important characteristics and conditions of the social and political present in the country more intelligible. This, in itself, is a project, which is incredibly complex and requires time and space, which go far beyond the capacities of this study. As such, the focus has fallen on a very specific part of the Bulgarian present, which has attracted very little research so far – the panel block. The panel block, which remains one of the main housing arrangements for a majority of the population in Bulgaria, has been shown to participate in a specific form of a politics of space, which is inherently connected to

the historical transformation of individuals, both before, and after, the fall of totalitarianism. In a sense, the panel block has been used as a magnifying glass in order to make visible some of the central the non-discursive practices involved in this transformation.

Before 1989, the institutionalization of this foreign architecture into the Bulgarian society served a much more profound function than the solving of the housing problem, caused by the large waves of migration to the cities. It was an architecture, whose main purpose was the creation of a 'socialist citizen' through the alteration of behaviour, habits, and mentalities. The institutionalization of the panel block is inherently linked to a form of cellular power, which functions through the internal control of the everyday lives of individuals. This is a power, which homogenised and disciplined a large segment of the population through their fixation in a constrained space, or within a space of 'caged freedom'.

After 1989, despite the fall of the regime, the structure of the panel remains the most distinguishing feature of the Bulgarian cityscape. Nonetheless, there was a significant alteration of the kind of relationship it was to have with its inhabitants. This is constitutive of a significant transformation in the power relations at hand, through which the individuals are made into subjects. After the fall of the regime and the acquisition of ownership of the apartments into the by their inhabitants, the panel block becomes a structure, a space, of self-recognition through which individuals become tied to their own identity. Nonetheless, while this signifies a symbolic transition towards modernity, it is not a process automatically achieved by the transition to democracy and the inauguration of the 'democratic citizen'. In fact, it has been shown that change in the everyday lives of individuals after the fall of the regime has been very slow, piecemeal, and fragmented. This has been exemplified by the phenomenon of the 'glazed balcony'.

Therefore, underneath the ‘heroization’ of the post-socialist transition to democracy as aligned to the overall project of modernity, the architecture of the panel represents some of the concrete personal transformations and reproductions of modernity in the everyday lives of individuals. Essentially, this has been a research into an area of banality: even the panel blocks have functioned as a capillary of power relations and have participated in the transformation of individuals from the first moment of their institutionalization in the early 1960s; today no one really *sees them*. Thus, the focus of this study has been to show the historical transformations of individuals through the architecture of the panel block.

**Acknowledgements:** I would like to thank Dafina Gercheva, Ivan Nikolov, Petar Petrov, Emil Portalski, Milena Benovska-Subkova, Antonii Galabov, for the assistance offered during the final stages of this project.

#### NOTES

1. This study is part of author’s MSc thesis, defended on 16/12/12 at the London School of Economics, UK.

2. The Bulgarian equivalent to the word ‘citizen’ – *grazhdanin* (гражданин) is somewhat different to its English translation; apart from its direct reference to the legal recognition of a member of state or city, it also means a city dweller. However, like the distinction between ‘villager’ and ‘peasant’, this word also constitutes a highly ambiguous meaning.

3. An important distinction must be made here regarding the output of Bulgarian cinema in the 1960s, when it was predominantly concerned with the propaganda of constructing a ‘new’ society’ and the 1970, when there is a sense of a semi-emancipation of the arts.

4. В-к Стандарт, 22 февруари 2002 г.

5. В-к Дневник, 27 май 2002 г.

6. *Mladost* is one of the first panel block neighbourhoods build in the periphery of Sofia. Its name derives from the word ‘youth’.

7. This is a very specific Bulgarian word concerning architectural space delineating the heterogeneity of the (ancestral) family home.

8. ‘Say health to it’ – *zdrave mu kazhi* [здраве му кажи] is a Bulgarian phrase which lacks a direct English translation. In this context it is meant as a sign of bewilderment and disbelief.

9. Българска комунистическа партия (БКП) – Bulgarian Communist Party; Български земеделски народен съюз (БЗНС) - Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BZNS).

10. Todor Zhivkov (1911-1998) was a communist politician and leader of the People's Republic of Bulgaria (PRB) from March 4, 1954 until November 10, 1989.

11. Song by Assen Gargov – Razvod mi dai

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ylof7hMHKnE>

12. <http://www.eusew.eu/awards2011-living>

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