

Spezialthema / Special Section*

**PERIPHERE METROPOLEN – DYNAMIK DER
STADTENTWICKLUNG IN SÜDOSTEUROPA**
*PERIPHERAL METROPOLISES – URBAN DYNAMICS
IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE*

**PERIPHERAL METROPOLISES IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE
AN INTRODUCTION**

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with 1 figure in the text

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Summary

Among the European peripheries, Southeast Europe stands out as a specific periphery. In a historic view, it is rooted in a Byzantine and Ottoman past. Industrialisation and urbanisation arrived with considerable delay, to be intensified by varieties of Communist rule after World War II. Since 1989/1992, post-socialist transformation was accompanied by the break-up of Yugoslavia and several wars. After stabilisation, eight nation-states have applied for EU membership, and four have joined since. For the metropolises (and capital cities) of this region, integration into the European and global economy has increased their status as gateways for investment and traffic – tending to leave their own, the periphery's periphery, behind. Large urban development projects are being planned and built in all metropolises of Southeast Europe, as symbols of new nation-states and anchors for investment capital. In the name of national priorities and technocratic necessities, special legislation tends to by-pass local powers. All these topics are analysed in the five articles on "Peripheral Metropolises – Urban Dynamics in Southeast Europe" that follow, to which this article offers an overview and introduction.

Keywords: Metropolises, Southeast Europe, Balkans, periphery, urban development projects

Zusammenfassung

PERIPHERE METROPOLLEN IN SÜDOSTEUROPA. EINE EINFÜHRUNG.

Südosteuropa ist, im europäischen Kontext, eine sehr spezifische Peripherie. Die historischen Wurzeln der Besonderheiten dieser Region reichen weit zurück: die Ära der byzantinischen sowie der osmanischen Herrschaft haben diesen Raum lange geprägt und damit Einflüsse und Entwicklungen aus dem westlichen Europa verzögert. So haben auch Industrialisierung und Urbanisierung Südosteuropa spät erreicht. Erst nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, unter kommunistischer Herrschaft, hat eine nachholende Entwicklung stattgefunden, bei beträchtlichen nationalen Unterschieden. Seit der Wende 1989/1992 hat die post-sozialistische Transformation, verzögert durch militärische und politische Konflikte, zu einer allmählichen Stabilisierung der Staaten geführt. Mittlerweile sind vier Staaten in der Region der Europäischen Union beigetreten, weitere vier Staaten haben Beitrittsstatus. Für die Metropolen und Hauptstädte dieser Region hat mit dieser Entwicklung eine zunehmende Internationalisierung stattgefunden, meist jedoch beschränkt als Kapital- und Infrastrukturdrehscheibe in die eigene, nationale Peripherie. Städtebauliche Großprojekte finden sich in sämtlichen Metropolen Südosteuropas, als Symbole der jungen Nationalstaaten und als Ankerpunkte für Investitionskapital. Kennzeichen dieser Großprojekte ist häufig eine Umgehung kommunaler Akteure und Entwicklungskonzepte. Diese hier angesprochenen Aspekte der Stadtentwicklung in der europäischen Peripherie werden in den fünf Artikeln des Spezialthemas „Peripheral Metropolises – Urban Dynamics in Southeast Europe“ behandelt. Der vorliegende Beitrag bietet dazu eine Einführung und einen konzeptionellen Rahmen.

Schlagwörter: Metropolen, Südosteuropa, Balkan, Peripherie, städtebauliche Projekte

1 Introduction

In relation to the European core region in the Northwest, Southeast Europe is a peripheral region, a designation which is widely associated with terms such as economic and societal underdevelopment, instability, and ethnical conflicts – its stigmatisation being expressed in the term “Balkanization” (TODOROVA 1997; BOBIC 2019). Leaving prejudices behind, this themed section is driven by two motives: first, we intend to ask in what way the peripherality of this region is having an impact on recent urban developmental processes. Second, this themed section wants to contribute to the discussion on the explanatory value of dominant urban theories and concepts (that have been developed in central regions) for metropolises in Southeast Europe.

The consideration behind is the fact that this region is easily overlooked or even neglected in historical, sociological, or geographical studies covering Europe as a whole, or in research conducted on the European scale. For instance, in HOHENBERG and LEES’ (1995) book on the formation of the urban system, Southeast Europe remains a white spot. Likewise, we do not find this region in Stein Rokkan’s conceptual map of Europe (FLORA 2000), or in BRAUDEL’s (1986) world system. This is also the case in Jenő SZÜCS’ (1990) three historic European regions – at least, because “it fell out of the European structures” for more than 500 years (*ibid.*, p. 17). This list could be easily expanded, also regarding urban theories: in the global city literature (TAYLOR et al. 2011), or in the perception of European financial centres (Z/YEN 2017), Southeast Europe appears as an empty space. In the debates on the specificities of the European City (LE GALÈS 2002; LETHO 2000; MATZNETTER and MUSIL 2012), this region and its urban pattern is left aside. It seems that – apart from Balkan studies – the widespread stigmatisation of this region also contributes to an exclusion from academic debates.

In contrast to this, focusing on Southeast Europe seems worthwhile for two reasons. First, discussing dominating theories or concepts in urban research from an urban periphery point of view allows for critical reflection and discussion, for instance, on the relevance of context or the “nestedness” of cities (HILL and FUJITA 2003) or the conceptual (over-)expansion of travelling ideas (MALOUTAS 2012). We suppose that critical reflections of space- and context-bound theories are more inspiring when conducted from the periphery rather than from the centre, where they have been developed.

Secondly, beside these theoretical considerations, Southeast Europe is relevant as a region that has a gateway function between continental Europe and Western Asia. We do not have to go far back in history to confirm the thesis that the dynamics of this region greatly affects the economic core region of the continent. From the Balkan Wars, both World Wars, through Tito Yugoslavia’s global ambition for an alternative model, the long tradition of guest-worker migration and the post-Yugoslav wars, to the Balkan route and the refugee crisis in Europe, or the strategic infrastructure investments (“new silk road”) of Chinese state funds: the implications are manifold, not just for Central Europe, but for the continent as a whole.

What makes Southeast Europe as a periphery so specific? What are the implications for urban dynamics? To answer these questions, we first discuss them from an idiographic, cultural-historical and geographical perspective, and second, we look at them according

to nomothetic, theoretical concepts and models of periphery and peripheralisation. From these two perspectives, we deduce a number of implications for historic and recent urbanisation processes in what we call peripheral metropolises.

2 Southeast Europe – a specific European region

The designation “Southeast Europe” is more or less synonymous with the term “*Balkans*” (CALIC 2016), even if both have different spatial delimitations (JORDAN 2005): the “*Balkans*” are delimited by the eastern and western coastline (excluding Dalmatia) of the peninsula, and the Una-Sava-Danube line in the north. Beyond that, “*Southeast Europe*” comprises Slovenia, Croatia, Northern Serbia, the Islands of the Aegean and Cyprus, Romania and Moldova. The formative characteristics that determine the specific structure of the Balkans as a (culture-)historic region have been rarely debated for a long time – because neither in the societies of Southeast Europe (due to a nationalist perspective) nor in the rest of Europe (due to a general lack of interest), this issue has been of particular interest (SUNDHAUSSEN 1999).

We suggest explaining the “otherness” of Southeast Europe in relation to other European regions according to cultural-historical criteria (ibid.; JORDAN 2005; HÖSCH 1995). Following Braudel’s idea of different layers of time (BRAUDEL 1977), we differentiate these criteria first into long-lasting and structure-formatting characteristics, which reflects the underlying structures and arrangements of societies. These comprise a time horizon of centuries, in the sense of a slow history or “*longue durée*”. Second, we identify criteria that are rather to be located on an intermediate time scale, such as economic cycles, which are more visible (and measurable), and embrace a time horizon of decades.

Long-term, structure-formatting characteristics

(1) **Small-scaled, multi-ethnic societies**

Since the Byzantine era, this region has experienced movements of ethnic groups and forced resettlements due to political and military conflicts. In particular, the expansion and the retreat of the Ottoman Empire triggered the settlement of ethnic groups from Asia Minor, and the spreading of the Islamic faith. Furthermore, regional movements of Slavic groups from the central basins to the mountain areas as well as the tradition of nomadic farming (“*transhumance*”, cf. BEUERMANN 1967), assimilation, and conversion processes produced an interlaced mosaic of ethnic, religious, and language groups and further stabilised a localised, patriarchal and archaic family law, as well as a refusal of state institutions. More recently, the formation of independent states during the 19th and 20th centuries was driven by the idea of a homogenous national state, which triggered numerous displacements, ethnic cleansing, and military conflicts, up to the present day.

(2) **Byzantine-Orthodox and Ottoman-Islamic heritage**

Although the southern Balkan may be called the “*cradle of ancient Europe*”, its heritage has been absorbed into that of Western Europe, while Byzantine-Orthodox culture

dominated the Balkans for about 1,000 years. The “model Byzantium” deviates from the Western model in several fundamental aspects: while Roman law (individual-based civil law and property rights) has been widely adopted in Western Europe, it has been hollowed out in Byzantine society. Furthermore, the ancient divine empire continued in the “symphony between church and secular law” in the Byzantine model, whilst Western Europe was shaped by the conflict between popes and emperors. Major societal and cultural movements – such as Renaissance, Humanism, Reformation and Counter-Reformation or Enlightenment – scarcely affected the Balkan societies. The Ottoman era deepened the isolation of this region; furthermore, the ruling system did not fully penetrate the societies in the Balkans, in contrast to the absolutist Western European state. Outside of the larger cities, this caused the conservation of clientelist networks in rural areas, and did not trigger impulses towards a technical, economic, or societal modernisation.

Characteristics of intermediate duration

(1) **Economic underdevelopment**

The societal backwardness of the Byzantine and Ottoman periods (e.g. no separation of church and state, traditional, anti-emancipatory, and anti-Enlightenment worldview) impeded innovation and the formation of capitalist structures. In particular, the urban societies failed to develop a capitalist production system and long-distance trade networks. During the 19th century and until the interwar period, industrialisation could not catch up with Western Europe, due to the lack of a fully-fledged banking sector and a proto-industrial basis, supporting services, and institutions (GYIMESI 1989). Furthermore, infrastructures, particularly the transport system (railway network), were far below Central European standards and hampered industrialisation and urbanisation processes (STANEV 2013). On the eve of World War II, the new south-eastern states suffered from a negative trade balance. Due to their weak competitiveness, exports were dominated by raw materials and agricultural goods, and imports by industrial products (KOPSIDIS 2012); as such, they were more similar to developmental economies.

(2) **Instable states and weak institutions**

The retreat of the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century triggered the successive formation of independent states, which tried to connect historic territories (e.g. the Greater Serbian Empire, Second Greater Bulgarian Empire). Furthermore, the newly formed states were geared towards the Western concept of the homogenous nation-state, which was in conflict with the multicultural tradition of the Balkan region. Considering these small-structured multi-ethnic patterns, the policy of the national state triggered ethnic conflicts, displacements, and border conflicts – from the Balkan wars of 1912–1913 until today. Beyond that, neither the Ottoman Empire (with its strategy of *pax ottomana*) nor the new national states (due to limited resources and a lack of tradition) developed stable, modern, and democratic institutions.

(3) **Influence of external powers**

The dominance of external powers is a general constant in the history of the Balkans, from ancient times up to the present. From ancient times, the region was predominantly under the influence of Byzantium, Constantinople or Istanbul, the western

coast being partially integrated into the Venetian Empire. This long-term subordination had manifold implications for the Balkan societies in political, cultural-religious, and military aspects, all of which transformed these societies. The retreat of the Ottoman Empire led to its replacement by other powers, in particular the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian Empire, as well as other European powers. After World War II, the region (excluding Greece, and partially Albania and Yugoslavia) was under the political, economic, and military control of the Soviet Union. Since 1989, the external influence showed a re-orientation and diversification: NATO, the European Union and Russia are the dominating powers, but China and some Arab countries are expanding their geopolitical interests, mainly via infrastructure investments.

3 Southeast Europe through the lens of periphery approaches

In the standard regional economic literature, peripheries are seen in a clear dichotomy with the centres and have at least one of the following characteristics: remoteness, an underdeveloped economic structure, selective migration, or a general subordination to the core region (PALME and MUSIL 2012). Both on the regional and on a global scale, polarisation approaches focus on the relation of dependence between centres and peripheries through cumulative processes of growth and decline, as a consequence of centripetal and centrifugal forces (e.g. MYRDAL 1957; NOVY et al. 1999). In addition, approaches of the dependency school and radical geography pick up the idea of uneven accumulation processes, but detach the concept of periphery from a spatial logic and only define it in a functional way: centre and periphery is not a spatial, but a social relation. As such, unevenness is seen as a precondition and consequence of the capitalist world system (WALLERSTEIN 1986). In these approaches, the metropolises in the periphery have specific functions for the coordination of production or resource extraction, both in a historical perspective (BRAUDEL 1986) as well as in the recent era of globalisation. These cities are described as “global integrated urban fragment” (SCHOLZ 2004) or as “gateway in the urban archipelago” (BRAUDEL 1986).

Network approaches shed light on the role of weak social or informational network relations of peripheries within the space of flows (CASTELLS 1998). In this sense, Stein ROKKAN, in his “conceptual map of Europe”, also defines peripheries by a lack of power relations towards the centres, due to administrative/military subjection, economic dependency, or cultural subordination (cf. FLORA 2000). These relational perspectives do not contradict the classic polarisation or dependency approaches, but they enable new methodological approaches (e.g., social network analysis) and consider the role of discourses in the marginalisation of regions. Combining traditional and recent approaches, KÜHN and WECK (2013) formulated the concept of peripheralisation, which provides a more dynamic and multi-layered understanding of periphery and distinguishes four dimensions, which we discuss here in the context of Southeast Europe:

- (1) **Migration.** Since the early 1990s, Southeast Europe – like all transformation countries – has been facing a strong net outmigration, leading to the loss of a productive,

highly-qualified and well-educated labour force and – combined with decreasing fertility – to a general population shrinkage. Between 1990 and 2020, the whole region experienced a decrease in population from 74.9 million to 64.3 million, i.e., a total loss of 10.6 million (or minus 14 percent; Eurostat Database 2020). Within the whole region, the pattern of net in- and outmigration is very heterogeneous, particularly between urban and rural regions.

- (2) **Decoupling** as a passive falling behind the core regions in Europe. This dimension comprises economic aspects such as a weak innovation dynamic, due to a low degree of investments of private companies or public institutions in research and development (R&D); the consequence is a general limited growth potential and a delayed transformation towards a knowledge-based economy. As such, the R&D-investments per head in the south-eastern countries are the lowest in Europe: the annual per capita R&D expenditures are 111.2 Euro in 2017 (varying between 17.2 Euro in Northern Macedonia and 189.3 Euro in Greece). By contrast, the value for the Euro zone is 719.5 Euro, for Austria 1,289.9 Euro and for Switzerland even 2,355.9 Euro (Eurostat Database 2020). In total numbers, the R&D expenditures of Switzerland (19.8 billion Euro) are four times the volume of Southeast Europe as a whole (4.7 billion Euro). Beyond economic aspects, decoupling also comprises a backlog in technical and infrastructural standards – e.g., an underdeveloped public transport system, delayed access to the European high-speed railway system, or IT-infrastructures. Both aspects of decoupling impede the competitiveness of Southeast Europe and its convergence towards the core regions.
- (3) **Dependency**. The subordination to external political and economic decision-makers is a core assumption of Marxist/dependency approaches. For Southeast Europe, political dependency is a constant in the history of the whole region, which continues to the present. Political dependency accompanies economic dependency; this assumption can easily be confirmed by the recent situation in the economies of Southeast Europe. The economies of the region became targets for inward foreign direct investments (FDIs) from foreign multinational corporations (MNCs), but there are hardly any local companies able to place FDIs in foreign countries. The consequence of this “overdependency” is a transformation of the economies towards the requirements of foreign companies (JACOBS 2017) and a lack of control over their own economy, which becomes apparent in the banking sector, where the degree of foreign control in the region is between 51 and 85 percent (BECKMANN et al. 2018). Consequently, the integration of this region into the global economy is limited to less human capital-intensive production; profits of the local economy are transferred abroad.
- (4) **Stigmatisation**. Finally, the last dimension of peripheralisation, comprising negative images and prejudices that are linked to both self-image and foreign image, is a constitutive characteristic of this region, at least since the early 20th century (SUNDBAUSSEN 1999). This becomes apparent in the term “Balkanization”, used first in the New York Times in 1918, meaning the “fragmentation of larger political and economic entities and the consequent political instability of this region” (TODOROVA 1997, p. 33).

The specific cultural-historic characteristics, which are related to different layers of time, as well as the multidimensional peripheralisation of this region have a number of implications for historical urbanisation patterns and recent urban dynamics. The juxtaposition of historical-idiographic characteristics and theoretical periphery approaches define Southeast Europe as a “specific periphery” in Europe – on their own, neither a historical approach, nor a theory-based model would offer a sufficient explanation. In the following section, we discuss the implications of this “specific periphery” for recent urban dynamics: the pattern of urbanisation, the delayed urbanisation in the 20th century, the economic polarisation, the geopolitical interests and related to this, the high degree of external (economic) urban dependency.

4 Implications for urban development in Southeast Europe

Southeast Europe is characterised by delayed urbanisation, which can be traced back to the Middle Ages: the medieval boom of urban foundations, which formatted a dense pattern of numerous smaller and larger cities in Central Europe, only affected the margins of this region (HOHENBERG and LEES 1995). During the 400 years of Ottoman rule, only a few additional larger cities arose in Southeast Europe (Edirne, Skopje, Sarajevo, Belgrade [Beograd], Sofia, Bucharest [Bucureşti]). In the 13th and 14th centuries, only Constantinople and Thessaloniki are recorded as cities with a population of more than 40.000 people (VANDERMOTTEN et al. 1999), quite in contrast to other more urbanised peripheries in Southern Spain and Southern Italy. Furthermore, the cities in this region – beyond some coastal towns for resource extraction – hardly played a relevant role as nodes in the urban trade network (BRAUDEL 1986). Also, in the “long 19th century”, when industrialisation and urbanisation swept the core regions of Europe, both arrived in Southeast Europe with a delay of about 150 years. Urbanisation intensified mainly after the new nation-states had consolidated in the late 19th century, in the inter-war years, or even later, in the decades of Communist rule.

The outcome of these historical processes is a sparse urban system with a low population density. Although urbanisation rates got closer to Western European levels, the thin urban network is dominated by a limited number of national capitals. Distances between larger cities (above 150.000 inhabitants) are great, and due to weak infrastructures, travel times between cities are even greater (ROZENBLAT 2009). Concepts such as “European Metropolitan Regions” (BBSR 2011) or cross-border urban networks (e.g. on Vienna – Bratislava: MATZNETTER 2016), which are well established in Western Europe, are not applicable in Southeast Europe, due to the great distances in space and time. Beyond the sparse urban network, the ethnical and territorial fragmentation of the region also impedes the formation of regional urban centres.

The urban network of Southeast Europe is composed of several national urban systems, which are hardly linked to each other. As a consequence, a functional division of labour between the larger agglomerations in Southeast Europe does not exist, and agglomerations such as Athens [Athina] or Vienna [Wien] have become gateways and hubs for regional headquarters of this region (MUSIL 2009).

Within the small countries and their economies, the capital cities have become the economic and demographic epicentres. While countries were losing population due to emigration and low fertility rates, only the capitals (beside some touristic hotspots, e.g. on the Black Sea) were migration targets. They were the only places where the post-socialist economy offered good job perspectives for both the less educated and the highly educated workforce, due to a concentration of new service sectors or due to construction dynamics. The underdeveloped but emerging service sector (in particular banking, insurance, and other firm-related services) offered attractive opportunities for foreign companies.

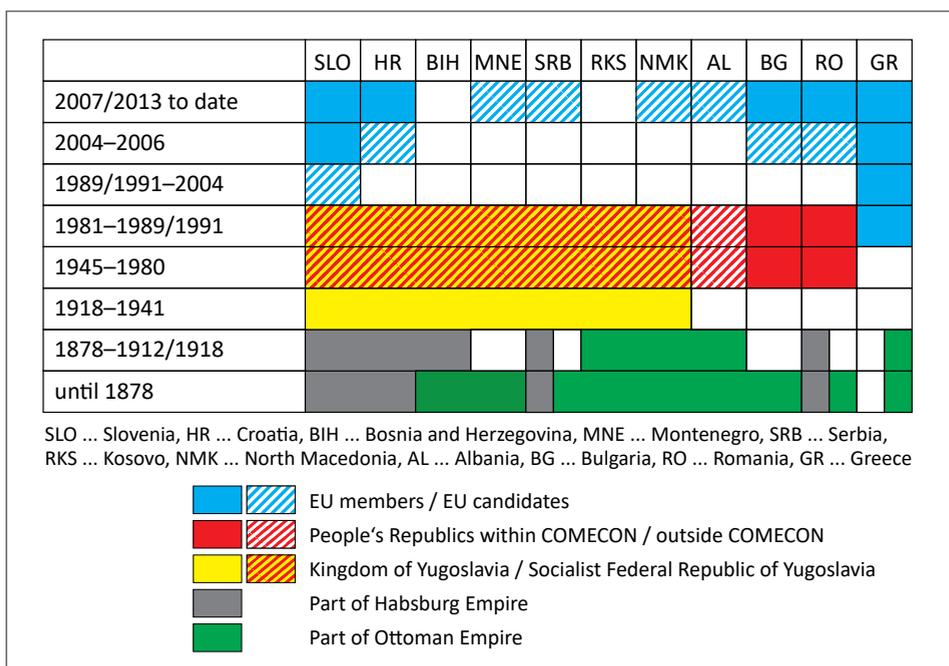
For investors, the (new) capital cities were the gates of entry into national markets, the relay stations to the global economy, where the majority of foreign direct investments (FDIs) has taken place. Therewith, the national capitals became national epicentres for the branches of international companies, some of them even established as cities with a (weak) global city status (TAYLOR 2011). Compared to the socialist past, capital cities have now increased their share in the national economies, thus enlarging the rural-urban divide. This mutual reinforcement of demographic and economic centralisation in the national capitals – a metropolisation – is a crucial characteristic of the transformation economies in the region and is a consequence of as well as a prerequisite for their peripheral position.

External control and influence have been a historical constant until present times. This is not only limited to FDIs or foreign firms, but also – often related – to external geopolitical powers (see Figure 1). Since the retreat of the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Soviet Union became the dominating external power until 1990. In the last three decades, Southeast Europe has become a region of overlapping geopolitical interests: many countries became members of the European Union and the NATO, while Russia, China and some Arab countries also strive for political and economic influence.

These activities remind us of larger geopolitical interests in the Balkan peninsula that impinge upon investments, infrastructure, and alliances in the area. In the countries (still) outside the European Union, where only global trade regulations apply, these interests come to the fore. No systematic overview being available, two (mega-) projects shall illustrate coordinated investment in the Balkans by non-European stakeholders.

Our first example is the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI or “New Silk Road”) launched by China in 2013 to improve sea and land connections to and from most continents, including Europe. Southeast Europe is in the focus of these activities due its geostrategic position on both arms of the BRI, the “Maritime Silk Road” and the “Silk Road Economic Belt” (SCHMIDT 2019). All along these corridors, Chinese enterprises are engaged in major infrastructure projects, such as the new port of Piraeus, the high-speed train between Belgrade and Budapest, or the Pupinov Bridge in Belgrade. Loans are financed by either the Chinese Export-Import Bank (EXIM) alone, or together with the European Investment Bank (EIB). In the long run, the Athens – Belgrade – Budapest link will offer an alternative to the EU’s TEN-T Corridor No. 4 which establishes the same link via the EU member states Romania and Bulgaria.

The second example is Eagle Hills, an Abu Dhabi-based real estate developer, having expanded from the Arab Gulf into Southeast Europe in recent years. Their 3 billion US



Source: MATZNETTER and MUSIL 2011, modified

Figure 1: Reconfiguration of territories and external powers in Southeast Europe¹⁾

dollars Belgrade Waterfront project is currently under construction, replacing the former stockyards of Belgrade Main Station (cf. ALY 2020 in this volume), and the Zagreb government has selected their “City within the City” project, due to replace the current Zagreb Trade Fair and Hippodrome area, but this project is now on hold (cf. BABIĆ 2020 in this volume).

Both groups of projects are testimonies to the economic and geopolitical interests in Southeast Europe as a special European periphery, with a number of small nation-states, fragmented between being full EU members, EU candidates, and would-be candidates, adding to this the aspect of NATO membership and aspirations cutting across all fields. Here, the “acquis communautaire” only partially applies, and direct contacts between investors and local stakeholders and politicians can be established.

On an urban level, such circumstances have been interpreted by THEURILLAT et al. (2016, p. 1512) as “financialised cities”, where “investors compare the financial risks and yields of one real estate investment fund [...] with another, but above all with those of other categories of financial assets, by sector [...] and by territory”. Investors are in a strong

¹⁾ In this figure, the most recent phase of development is displayed on top. Earlier phases are shown below, to illustrate the embeddedness of current fragmentations and reconfigurations in earlier forms of statehood in Southeast Europe. – NB: The Republic of Kosovo is recognised by 22 member states of the EU-27 and 98 UN member states out of 193, but not, for example, by the Republic of Serbia.

position vis à vis urban politics, because they always have the option to leave, a fact which THEURILLAT et al. call the “weak anchoring of capital”. For this reason, urban investments have turned towards national prestige and interest and many projects are arranged by intergovernmental contracts that overrule urban institutions and interest groups.

5 Introducing the collection of articles

Following our call for papers in 2019, we received some 20 abstracts, from which we invited a number of colleagues to develop their proposal to a full paper which would undergo double-blind refereeing. After submission in May 2020, and after one or two revisions over the summer and autumn following the referees’ and our editorial advice, the following five articles have emerged from this process. We think that these articles now feed into a coherent argument around the current state of Southeast European cities. Not surprisingly, given the forces of polarisation in peripheral nation-states, they are all capital cities, some of them newcomers, some of them since the 19th century. Only the last contribution diverges from this pattern, addressing the regional policy of EU member Romania as a whole, with a non-capital region as its case study.

Before introducing these five articles one by one, some of the themes and theories addressed in all of them should be emphasised. All contributors seem to be convinced of Southeast Europe’s being a special kind of periphery, with its cities framed by specific conditions, and intertwined with BRAUDEL’s layers of time. Given the territorial fragmentation of Southeast Europe, the scale of uniqueness differs amongst the authors. Sometimes it is a common uniqueness that is shared by all post-Yugoslav cities, then it is the timing of EU accession which creates uniqueness, or the fact of being together in the accession pipeline, sometimes just one city (Tirana [Tiranë]) seems to be ruled by exceptional urbanism.

All cities in this themed section are post-socialist cities, but their socialist experiences were quite distinct, and so are their legacies. Hence, the various stages of transformation from a planned to a market economy are assumed to be complete, and the focus is on recent investments, mainly in large urban development projects (UDPs), by national and global capital (only gated communities being smaller scale). In most articles, the economic setting of post-socialism is described as hyper-capitalist, and facilitated by exceptional legislation. Such rulings distinguish peripheral urbanism from urbanism in the global cities of the European core, and they can contribute to further peripheralisation.

In the first contribution, Maja BABIĆ sets the stage with her portrayal of three urban development projects (UDPs) in three capitals of now-independent states which have emerged from the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. They are all post-socialist cities, but, as Yugoslav socialism differed in many ways, the author prefers to define them as post-Yugoslav cities as well. As elsewhere, a number of transformations characterised their transition from a centrally planned economy to a capitalist market economy: institutional, social, and urban transformations (cf. SÝKORA and BOUZAROVSKI 2012), but these stages came at different times, as well as at different speeds and intensities in the successor states of Yugoslavia. Even if all UDPs in Maja BABIĆ’ article share a hyper-capitalist and financialised setting, with relaxed planning control,

and nation-building ambitions, these conditions differ between Sarajevo in 2008, Belgrade in 2014, and Zagreb in 2019, greatly depending on whether EU legislation applies (Zagreb), or is being negotiated (Belgrade), or is not expected in the current decade (Sarajevo).

Hend ALY's contribution comes second, dealing with UDPs again, even with the same project in Belgrade, as well as another in Tirana. Here, the focus shifts from architecture to governance processes in the post-socialist city that seem to apply to a broader range of cities, beyond former Yugoslavia and Southeast Europe. In order to improve their global cityness, special legislation has been enacted in many cities of the global and European periphery to speed up and facilitate urban megaprojects. As the author points out, such depoliticisation strategies are particularly critical in the fragile democracies of the Western Balkans, when authoritarian and technocratic decisions tend to bypass democratic institutions and replace participatory mechanisms, at least in the periods between elections. For both Belgrade and Tirana, such processes are well documented in this chapter, as well as the counter-movements they have triggered in both cities.

Once again, urban development projects are centre stage in Daniel GÖLER and Dhimitër DOKA's article on 21 such projects in Tirana, some of which are completed while other are under construction. The New National Theatre, the contested example from Hend ALY's article, is one of these UDPs. In contrast to ALY, who focusses on the similarities in urban governance between Belgrade and Tirana, GÖLER and DOKA stress the specificities of the Albanian capital: extreme demographic growth, hyperurbanisation with no control in the 1990s, and weak urban planning since, with national growth coalitions of Albanian entrepreneurs and politicians intervening locally, under special legislation, and almost no connection to the international capital market. They remind us that the socialist city of the past came in many more variants than the advanced Central and Eastern European examples dominating the literature. Evolving from a very specific socialist past, Tirana has quickly developed into its very specific post-socialist present: isolated megaprojects, in the form of detached monoliths, are scattered around the city, all nationally financed, reminiscent of urban development in ordinary cities of the global South.

Gated communities are frequent in the European periphery, from Southern to Eastern Europe. This is the topic of our fourth article, by Christian SMIGIEL, Kostyantyn MEZENTSEV and Nataliia PROVOTAR. For the sake of comparison, they take us outside Southeast Europe, with Sofia as their case-study, to post-Soviet Eastern Europe, with Kiev [Kyiv] as their testing ground. As in Maja BABIĆ' article, these post-socialist cities share a number of similarities, but they are different according to their legal and institutional framing, much of which has to do with the depth of EU integration. Foreign direct investments, in gated housing or elsewhere, seem to be attracted by EU membership, as the case of Sofia shows, and much restrained when there is no prospect of it. Peripherality seems to induce a greater volatility of housing prices (cf. SMIGIEL et al., Figures 1 and 3). In any case, there is a wealth of legal and institutional detail in their contribution, as well as on the varieties of forms, organisation, and finance an otherwise global phenomenon is taking amongst post-socialist cities.

Our last contribution, by Alexandru BRAD, is on a special kind of policy transfer, namely that of EU territorial cohesion policy to one of eight NUTS-2 regions in Roma-

nia. It illustrates what it means for regional and urban policy to be applied within a new member state of the European Union, or not. A range of instruments and funding become available, but they have been developed within the EU's densely populated, polycentric core areas, and have to be applied in a loosely populated, traditionally monocentric periphery, by an unexperienced planning administration. On the basis of document analysis and a large number of expert interviews, Alexandru BRAD explores this process bottom-up, how “distant learners” in the “periphery’s periphery” are trying to interpret and adapt to the jurisdictional complexity of evaluating and administering competitive projects. Such an environment is miles apart from the parachuting of global (and national) capital into megaprojects in the metropolises of Southeast and East Europe outside the EU – but they are united by the fact of being European peripheries trying to “catch up” with European core areas.

6 Conclusions and implications for research

Figure 1 offers a long-term view on two waves of fragmentation (19th century to 1918 and after 1991), each followed by a wave of reconfiguration, that have swept Southeast Europe. Nation-state building from the 19th century into the interwar period, multi-national federations and alliances under Communist rule, maximum fragmentation and wars in the 1990s, followed by a re-configuration dominated by the European Union, but contested by other geopolitical forces. As always, Southeast Europe continues to be a mosaic of political and economic entities, where the capital cities absorb much of the power, investments, and activities of their respective countries.

Over the last 30 years, all capital cities of Southeast Europe have become minor global cities, only weakly integrated into a global economy of flows of goods, services, and information. Within their small nation states, their economic, political, and demographic weight has grown, increasing the core-periphery divides. Amongst non-EU members, such polarisation is left to the market, in the hope that any investment in the capital city enhances the prosperity and visibility of the nation. With EU membership, more investment will be attracted to the country, and into regions beyond the capital region. Nevertheless, peripheralisation within nations continues, a trend to be counterbalanced by EU regional policy. Major infrastructural funding is also becoming available, but transport links towards the EU core will be upgraded first.

Regarding the questions raised in our call for papers, in autumn 2019, the majority has been addressed in this introduction already: the distinctive features of Southeast Europe as a special European periphery, its legacy as a fragmented borderland, the role of its primate capital cities. Our request for “travelling ideas” remains to be explicitly addressed.

Travelling ideas (MALOUTAS 2012) comprises the transfer of policies (from sectoral best practices to all-embracing neoliberal agendas) as well as the transfer of academic theories and concepts. All these travels are taking place in Southeast Europe as well, and they have mainly had their origin in the innovative core regions of Europe. Transferring such policies or concepts to the periphery, even more to a special periphery, is rarely an easy procedure, but full of misunderstandings and conflicts.

Our collection of articles abounds with stories of transfers: in most cases, it is a specific built form, the urban high-rise or megaproject, which is transferred to capital cities of the periphery, implanted as a harbinger and symbol of national progress and growth. Gated communities are another product to be imported, less exclusively, for the new middle class. Four of five articles deal with such a transfer of buildings, all including comments on the weak capacity of post-socialist urban planning, contributing to their random distribution within cities, while the fifth article (Alexandru BRAD) deals with the transfer of policy concepts and instruments that are “imported” from Brussels to the European periphery.

In Tirana, new multifunctional towers are called “kulla”, which in Albanian, Bulgarian, and Serbian is the word for the fortified towers greater families and clans used to build for themselves in times of weak (or wanting) state authority. Ironically, this historical term is a fitting description of recent urban dynamics, where urban projects are scattered around the city, without much guidance and control by urban planning, and dominated by private investors.

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