

TOWARDS A PHENOMENOLOGY OF URBAN PLANNING FOR THE CITY OF SOFIA

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Abstract. *Sofia has been described as a dynamic spirit catching up with contemporary European cities. Taking a phenomenological approach, this paper identifies the unique factors which distinguish it from other national capital cities. Orientation is important but equally significant is its recognition as the capital of the Republic of Bulgaria and as a symbol of the Bulgarian nation. Applying Norberg-Schulz's terminology, such appreciation is possible through identifying tangible and intangible phenomena that define the place, as well as the space occupied by contemporary Sofia. This thesis should not be read as a plea for nationalism but as an attempt to develop a philosophy of urban planning which is grounded in the memory of Bulgaria and Bulgarian identity.*

Keywords: *Sofia, urban planning, spirit of place, phenomenology.*

Introduction

Since 1879, when Sofia was designated as the national capital of Bulgaria, it has grown from a small, provincial town – far less significant than cities such as Plovdiv or Rousse – to the most significant social, economic and administrative centre of the country. Its cultural and economic development is predominantly due to its position in the Balkan region. Situated in western Bulgaria, at the northern foot of Mount Vitosha, which provides an imposing backdrop to the city, three mountain passes – historical routes since antiquity linking the Adriatic Sea and Central Europe with the Black and Aegean Seas – are located near the city. The theme and content of this article formed part of the subject of an unpublished doctoral research undertaken at the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, Sofia.¹

History of development control

Successive political regimes which ruled Bulgaria in the twentieth century desired to leave an imprint of their respective ideological utopias on the capital's landscape, affecting the zoning and usage of both urban and green spaces within the city.² Over this period, four masterplans for the city were developed: one pre-communist, two communist and one post-communist.³ These plans reflect the shift from fascism to socialist totalitarianism to a liberal system. The urban planning scheme of 1930 proposed by Adolph Muesmann favoured single-family residential units, each with a garden. This unrealized

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¹ Bianco 2011a.

² Hirt 2008, p. 794–802.

³ Hirt 2005, p. 226–235.

plan was succeeded by communist schemes which encouraged multi-family residences with communal green areas, a concept abandoned after the removal of Theodor Zhivkov (1911–1998) from power in November 1989 and replaced by the present plan: a pro-capitalist ideology based on a mix of public and private spaces.⁴

Bulgarian planning legislation differentiates between spatial planning and a regional development process, each being regulated by the *Spatial Planning Act*⁵ and the *Regional Development Act*,⁶ respectively. Five pieces of urban planning legislation have been introduced since the liberation of Bulgaria in 1878. These are the *Human Settlements Public Work in the Kingdom of Bulgaria Act*,⁷ the *Human Settlements Public Work Act*,⁸ the *Human Settlements Planning Building Act*,⁹ the *Territorial and Settlement Planning Act*¹⁰ and the *Spatial Planning Act*.¹¹ The first two sets of legislation were introduced by the then-established Kingdom of Bulgaria. The first addressed human settlements consisting of residential blocks of fifty or more houses at a given site, whilst the second introduced the notion of masterplans. The *Human Settlements Planning Building Act*¹² and the *Territorial and Settlement Planning Act*¹³ were introduced by the post-WWII communist regime. The former included provisions for the establishment of cadastre activities and town development plans and introduced regulations for building development. The latter, enacted by Zhivkov's government, made provisions for the establishment of a system of national and local plans. Urban planning was then centralized and regulated by a territorial development plan for the whole national territory. This model was ignored after 1989, thus creating a vacuum which resulted in the abandonment of planning practice in the country. In 1998, the practice of urban planning was restored as a concept but this time it was inspired by decentralisation. The *Spatial Planning Act*¹⁴ set out procedures for present and future urban development of cities within the country.

⁴ Hirt 2011; Brantz, Dümpelmann 2006.

⁵ National Assembly 2001.

⁶ National Assembly 2004.

⁷ National Assembly 1897.

⁸ National Assembly 1941.

⁹ National Assembly 1949.

¹⁰ National Assembly 1973.

¹¹ National Assembly 2001.

¹² National Assembly 1949.

¹³ National Assembly 1973.

¹⁴ National Assembly 2001.

Approaches to urban planning

Urban planning up to the Liberation

At the time of the Liberation, the centre of Sofia comprised the square in front of the Mineral Bath and Banya Bashi Mosque. The main roads planned after the Liberation radiated outwards from this square through the five gates of the town: (i) the Trans-Balkan road to Lom and Vidin, (ii) the road via Nish to Belgrade, (iii) the road to Kyoustendil, (iv) the military road to Istanbul, and (v) the road to Pleven and Rousse. In contrast to the longstanding Ottoman town planning, these roads were planned directly to the town centre and ignored the existing urban fabric: “The five large streets, traced before the Liberation, formed the town’s framework. The town itself stretched over an area of 284 ha and was encircled by a large ditch.”¹⁵ The proposals, drawn over the period 1860–1870, included the destruction of a large number of buildings along the projected street layout. The planned roads, with rows of fruit trees along the sides, were more akin to British and similar traditions of urban design. The plan of the city created by the French engineer Licurgo Amadier,¹⁶ approved in 1880, called for the complete destruction of the existing historical centre of Sofia.

The garden city approach

Muesmann’s masterplan for the city, approved by decree in 1934, epitomised the garden city approach. Although unrealised, this plan was an important landmark in Sofia’s modern urban development, representing a systematic endeavour to apply the Garden City concept via a network of parks and open spaces. It “was the first scientific analysis of the city and the unfortunate consumption of its territory.”¹⁷ Muesmann’s brief, as set out by the municipal authorities, was “not to enlarge the city but, on the contrary, to gather it, because it is not in the abilities of a population ... to provide the resources in order to fully urbanise the city.”¹⁸ Muesmann, who had previously developed masterplans for Stuttgart and Düsseldorf, studied the city’s infrastructural network. His proposal developed the transportation network while preserving existing systems and extending them according to the radial concept of the garden city. It preserved and developed surviving spaces and buildings in the

¹⁵ Goranov 1938, p. 30. Apud Zheleva-Martins 2001, p. 466

¹⁶ Given that the transliteration of the Bulgarian name is Licurgo Amedei, his family name is popularly known as Amadie/Amadei, where the former is more likely, thus, written as Amadier. It might have been Amedeo or a similar name pointing to an origin which is not French. Also, Amadier/Amadie may potentially be an early transliteration when French was the universal hub to foreign names. The surname may not have been Amadier; as Licurgo, it channels attention to other ethnicities (Yassen Kyossev – Head, Department Urban Planning, Faculty of Architecture, University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, Sofia – personal communication).

¹⁷ Labov 2001, p. 515.

¹⁸ Ibid.

historic core but foresaw their utilisation as public spaces characterised by water and greenery. It offered a strong template which formed the core of subsequent plans for the city, including the contemporary masterplan.

Muesmann's plan came into effect following legislation enacted on 12 April 1938. The commencement of the Second World War led to the plan and its proposed schemes being aborted. The vast destruction of the built heritage, coupled with incompatible political agendas, saw Muesmann's concept fade away, although his infrastructural system scheme was broadly adhered to after the war. However, a new political avant-garde, inspired by a vision for a new socio-economic order based on the political ideology of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, emerged.

The Marxist-Leninist approach

The 1930s plan was replaced in the late 1940s by Lyuben Tonev's plan, which recommended setting up housing estates to cater for employees of the new industrial development programme of the Socialist regime. This plan was replaced in 1961 due to ideological changes; smaller hotels made way for large hotel complexes, and small factories were replaced by large state enterprises. Rural districts such as Lyulin and Mladost were replaced by massive housing units.

On 6 September 1945, a new masterplan, awarded after a public competition, came into effect. The new plan aimed at introducing order to the post-war chaos in the building industry. Confirmed in 1949, this plan remained in force until 1961. A government decree dated 20 November 1951, stated the government's intent to develop the city centre in the shortest possible timeframe. The architecture of the buildings had to be "national in form and socialist in content."¹⁹ The initial design proposals incorporated the demolition of the palace and the old urban core at Turgovska Street and Dondoukov Boulevard, including the demolition of St Nedelya's Church and Bania Bashi Mosque. Fortunately, these buildings were spared and the development undertaken preserved the historic St George's Church and St Petka Samardzhyska's Church. By the late 1950s, Sofia was "rapidly yielding her picturesque character to the standardization of a Soviet metropolis."²⁰

A new masterplan for the city was requested in 1956 by the Council of Ministers. Two proposals were put forward. The proposal from Lyubomir Neykov of Sofproekt Co. called for internal reconstruction, thus controlling the expansion of the city beyond the existing fringe. The proposal from Siromahov of Glavproekt Co. called for expansion beyond the existing city limits. The former was accepted and came into force in 1961. This plan took account of adjacent territories to the capital and the benefits arising from the

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 518.

²⁰ Winston 1957, p. 52.

surrounding geophysical settings, namely, Vitosha and Lyulin Mountains and the Pasarel and Iskar defiles. The projected increase in population within two decades was very close to reality but the same was not true of predictions about the transport network, mainly due to the significant increase in private vehicular traffic. The plan retained the historical spatial composition of the urban layout and rejected the notion of satellite towns and multi-layer crossings in the city centre.

Plans submitted in the 1963 international competition for the reconstruction of the city centre reinforced the east-west axis but disregarded the historical urban fabric. They called for the destruction of historical districts containing valuable cultural buildings to make way for the erection of multi-storey constructions. On 25 April 1972, the Council of Ministers approved a preliminary proposal for the reconstruction of zones which included parts of the city centre, as well as national and international communications network infrastructure.

A revision of the 1975 general masterplan created by Staynov, incorporating the commendations of the 1972 scheme, was completed in 1979. The plan had serious unresolved limitations and remained unapproved. Up to 1989, the city's development was based on administrative concerns with no regard to scientific analysis or forecasts. Although significant public works were undertaken over this period, architectural design was deprived of humanity:

In the town-planning activities Man was replaced by Scheme. The street melted down into enormous lifeless and waste spaces. Water surfaces and gardens fell into oblivion. ... Architecture became a captive of geometry, seen as a synonym of aridity and callousness. Society gradually formed a negative attitude to architectural production in general.²¹

The spatial planning approach

Following the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, the municipal authorities announced a national competition for a General Masterplan for the city. This competition was aborted after the first phase, which involved nominating the teams that would work on the next phase. In 1998, the National Assembly embarked on an initiative to develop a new masterplan for the city. In line with the contemporary planning practice on the Continent, the municipal authorities shifted to a spatial planning approach. Spatial planning "determines the subordination and relationships between different types and levels of spatial plans; the procedures for their elaboration, approval and application; the roles and responsibilities of the respective institutions, etc."²²

²¹ Labov 2001, p. 523–524.

²² METREX 2006, p. 2.

Contemporary and future planning policies and directives for Sofia are developed according to an interdisciplinary approach aimed at regulating the development of the city and society at large. They are based on material considerations covering the social, economic, cultural and natural environs.²³ Spatial planning, as the term implies, is concerned with the production of space.

Critique

The above discussion sheds light on the consecutive approaches to the city planning from prior to Liberation up to the present. All are conditioned by the initial pre-Liberation scheme which imposed a radial layout, in lieu of a mechanised transport infrastructure, on the shape of the city which existed then. This radial layout ignored the existing setting and brought havoc on the building fabric to introduce a system of planning developed in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Yet, all approaches were concerned with the production of space as perceived through the ruling ideology of the state.

All three approaches to the urban planning of Sofia were conditioned by a political decision which was taken in the last decades of Ottoman occupation based on infrastructural development of the city centre along an east-west axis. This axis was used in Muesmann's 1938 scheme and was reinforced in the 1961 Neykon Plan, the 1963 international competition, and in subsequent schemes up to and including the masterplan for the city which came into force at the end January 2007. Indeed, future approaches to urban planning and design are affected by this axis. Under the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the communist administration, the approach to planning was centralised, whereas after 1989 it was decentralised. Muesmann's proposal called for a pyramidal structure, whereas the post Second World War proposal called for a polycentric structure; historic political buildings made way for new building constructions associated with the new political order. After 1989, the approach was first *laissez faire* and later channelled along urban practice in Europe. Following the country's accession into the European Union on 1 January 2007, Bulgaria is now legally bound to comply with EU directives, which are binding and enforced throughout the territories of all member states.²⁴

Despite the destruction of the late nineteenth century, Konstantin Jireček, an Austro-Hungarian Czech historian, diplomat and Bulgarian Minister of Education in 1881, perceived Sofia – in *Das fürstenthum Bulgarien*²⁵ and in his Bulgarian diary – as “the stage of the events and at the same time it is a living personality with a past of its own, maturing, education

²³ Bianco 2011b; Bianco 2011c.

²⁴ Bianco 2023, p. 188–189.

²⁵ Jireček 1891.

and ideas for the future.”²⁶ Indeed, the motto of the city of Sofia – “it grows, but does not age” – approved at the City Council at the turn of the twentieth century, reflects its vibrant evolution through time. These statements relate to the spirit of place. They stem from a phenomenological approach to the urban planning of the city.

The spirit of place

The cultural psyche

The site on which contemporary Sofia sits was originally a Thracian settlement that became the capital of Dacia Mediterranea, then known as Serdica. Sofia was named after St Sophia Church on the former site of the Roman necropolis. St Sophia is not a historical saint; she symbolises holy wisdom. A number of notable churches within the Byzantine Empire bear this dedication. These include Hagia Sophia, the Orthodox patriarchal basilica in Constantinople – a contemporary to the church in Sofia – and St Sophia Cathedral in Kiev. However, the only one which gave an identity to a national city is the one in Bulgaria. St Sophia Church in Bulgaria was a centre where scholars assembled during the medieval era.

The church is within walking distance of Banya Bashi Mosque and Sofia Synagogue. The sixteenth century mosque was constructed over natural thermal spas, whereas the synagogue is built on the site of its predecessor, constructed during the Ottoman occupation. These three places of worship, which still render services to believers today, represent the main monotheistic faiths of Europe: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. This is a testimony to the spirit of the metropolis, the cultural psyche of a city characterised by the sacredness and universality of place. All three faiths are present and co-exist in harmony in the city. This religious pluralism, coupled with the universality of values and beliefs, are Sofia’s living heritage. This capital is an ecumenical city of Europe par excellence; it is the city where the first edict of religious toleration – the Edict of Serdica – was issued in 311 by the Roman Emperor Galerius. This edict ended the Diocletianic persecution of Christians in the eastern part of the Roman Empire two years prior the Edict of Milan, which effectively endorsed it and halted persecution in the western part of the empire. The Bulgarians “stepped on the road to spiritual liberation even before Liberation.”²⁷ This context renders present Sofia as the real representation of the ring parable in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise*, published in 1779, in Berlin,²⁸ a play taken up by Peter Sloterdijk in *Gottes Eifer: Vom Kampf der drei Monotheismen*.²⁹

²⁶ Popnedelev 2001, p. 248.

²⁷ Ilchev 2005, p. 193.

²⁸ Bianco 2010, p. 38–41. Reproduced as a revised version in Bianco 2022a, p. 11–13.

²⁹ Sloterdijk 2007, p. 85, 123–126.

This spiritual heritage requires the acknowledgment of culture, not merely as a source of cultural capital, but as a source of values spanning from national dignity to identity, a resource which cannot be measured in terms of revenue. This position is in phase with a recommendation put forth in a 2004 policy paper on Bulgarian culture and its financial for the “disclosing and building of a new legitimacy of culture, not only like creator of a cultural capital, but also as a creator of values as – national pride and identity, which are not measured and established by market.”³⁰ Recalling the concept of *habitus* as developed by Bourdieu, a notion which links up with one’s perceptions of place and how these perceptions influence actions and interactions with the place and with other individuals – it refers to a “sense of one’s place ... a sense of the other’s place”³¹ – this legitimacy of culture transcends the network of complex processes which link the physical, the social and the psychological.

The value of traditions

Sofia is a centre of traditions,

[...] a centre of intertwining and mutually beneficial Bulgarian and foreign traditions, a centre of a culture seeking new European forms but preserving its national spirit and significance. Part of this culture was the system of town feasts most completely present in the capital city itself. After the Liberation it developed intensively, acquiring new structures and elements.³²

National pride and identity are values of tradition loaded with patriotism and worship (**fig. 1**, left). After Liberation, a new system of public holidays intended to express and reinforce Bulgarian national consciousness was introduced to complement traditional Bulgarian folk culture. Popular holidays served as a reminder of the pathway to attaining the national ideal: the liberation and unification of all Bulgaria. They raised the national consciousness, thus providing a manifestation of both beliefs and actions.³³

³⁰ Tomova 2004, p. 8.

³¹ Bourdieu 1990, p. 131.

³² Vasileva 2001, p. 278.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 279.



Fig. 1. (left) Gagauz dance in the village of Kestrich, now Vinitsa district, Varna, 1900;³⁴ (right) Sofia: the town hall in late 1870s/early 1880s³⁵

The traditions of a nation are important for its spiritual survival and therefore must not be forgotten. In his address to the World Summit of Religious Leaders held in Moscow from 3 to 5 July 2006, Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, stated that:

[...] due to their historic, religious and cultural traditions, different nations have different legal and political regulations and for this reason it is very important to perform constructive work on the convergence of our positions on the most important, key questions of life. The aim of this work cannot be mechanical soulless unification, excuse me, some dull and destructive standardization. The aim of such joint work can be only harmonization of the views preserving the entire diversity of the world.³⁶

Discussions

Recalling Christian Norberg-Schulz,

[...] when man dwells, he is simultaneously located in space and exposed to a certain environmental character. The two psychological functions involved may be called “orientation” and “identification.” To gain an existential foothold man has to be able to orientate himself; he has to know where he is. But he also has to identify himself with the environment, that is, he has to know how he is in a certain place.³⁷

This quote is from his seminal publication entitled *Genius Loci, Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. Norberg-Schulz was the first to attempt to address the issue of the phenomenology of place developed on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. His work attempts to value architecture in distinct

³⁴ <https://www.lostbulgaria.com/?p=1983>, accessed 20 May 2024.

³⁵ <https://www.lostbulgaria.com/?p=429>, accessed 20 May 2024.

³⁶ Zhelev 2009, p. 265.

³⁷ Norberg-Schulz 1980, p. 19.

existential terms, to “continue the search for a concrete understanding of the environment,”³⁸ a search which was introduced in his previous publications.³⁹

Sofia’s successive expansions since Liberation are characterized by radial expansion from the old town centre. Whilst the issue of orientation, ensured by essential spatial structures in the city, has been tackled, the theme of identification has never been addressed, even in contemporary spatial planning legislation. By the time Jireček was writing, in the 1890s, most of Sofia’s urban fabric had been destroyed (**fig. 1**, right).⁴⁰ Its urban spaces were irreversibly damaged. Streets, nodes and districts lost their identity, along with the traditional urban landscape, thus depriving later generations from meaning(s) associated with them and generating the experience of what might be called a “loss of place.” The environs in the immediate proximity of the Lion’s bridge are a case in point: from the former patterned bridge at the time of Liberation (**fig. 2**, top) to the paving of the bridge during first decade of the twentieth century (**fig. 2**, middle) and as at present (**fig. 2**, bottom). This loss of place became even more acute following the Second World War. Under Soviet socialist ideology, most of the remaining parts of the city were subject to extreme changes and most of the surviving traditional elements were corrupted or lost. As illustrations, one may cite Maria Luisa Boulevard and Dondukov Boulevard, in the early twentieth century (**fig. 3**, left and **fig. 4**, left, respectively) and at present (**fig. 3**, right and **fig. 4**, right, respectively), and Alexander Battenberg Square in the 1940s (**fig. 5**, left) and nowadays with the building of the former Communist Party Headquarters (**fig. 5**, right). Within this context one may ask: what is the *genius loci*, the spirit of Sofia? This is a phenomenological question which addresses the existential dimension of the city. According to Norberg-Schulz,

[...] the existential dimension is not “determined” by the socio-economical conditions, although they may facilitate or impede the (self-) realization of certain existential structures. The socio-economical conditions are like a picture-frame; they offer a certain “space” for life to take place, but they do not determine its existential meanings. ... [It] ... becomes manifest in history, but its meanings transcend the historical situation. History, on the other hand, only becomes meaningful if it represents new concretizations of the existential dimension.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁹ Norberg-Schulz 1965; Norberg-Schulz 1971; Norberg-Schulz 1975.

⁴⁰ The late nineteenth century Sofia town hall now houses the National Art Gallery. Although dated to the 1890s by the website <http://www.lostbulgaria.com/>, this date is not correct as the photo shows the Ottoman administration seat known as a *konak* and the *Cheleby Mosque*, as well as a ditch in front of them which only existed until the late 1870s/early 1880s (Yasen Kyosev, personal communication).

⁴¹ Norberg-Schulz 1980, p. 6.



Fig. 2. Lions' Bridge: (top) former bridge in 1879,⁴² (middle) paving of the bridge during first decade of the twentieth century,⁴³ and (bottom) at present

⁴² <https://www.lostbulgaria.com/?p=2891>, accessed 22 May 2024.

⁴³ <https://www.lostbulgaria.com/?p=79>, accessed 22 May 2024.



Fig. 3. Maria Luisa Boulevard: (left) early twentieth century,⁴⁴ and (right) at present



Fig. 4. Dondukov Boulevard: (left) early twentieth century,⁴⁵ and (right) at present



Fig. 5. Alexander Battenberg Square: (left) the site in the 1940s,⁴⁶ and (right) at present

Genius loci is a concept grounded in the ancient Roman belief that every being has its genius, its guardian spirit. “This spirit gives life to people and places, accompanies them from birth to death, and determines their

⁴⁴ <https://www.lostbulgaria.com/?p=3166>, accessed 22 May 2024.

⁴⁵ <https://www.lostbulgaria.com/?p=2666>, accessed 22 May 2024.

⁴⁶ <https://www.lostbulgaria.com/?p=3057>, accessed 22 May 2024.

character or essence.”⁴⁷ The genius states what the city is. In Sofia, the sense of *genius loci* is absent throughout except for the few historical buildings that survive. Sofia’s sense of place was destroyed pre-Liberation when the transport network and city layout were projected without accounting for its existing spaces, both physical and social. Most of the historical building fabric and street layout had been destroyed. What was imperative at that point was an efficient infrastructural network design which could drive the development of the city and propel it into the future. Current and future spatial planning in Sofia is in line with the professional practice elsewhere in Europe. Instruments, such as the official masterplan,⁴⁸ intelligently address public and other spaces. In existential terms, however, such instruments do not address place. Norberg-Schulz brought out the difference between these terms, noting that “the spaces where life occurs are *places* ... A place is a space which has a distinct character.”⁴⁹ Place is a definite expression of one’s existence; it includes tangible and intangible phenomena. In the case of Sofia, the tangible phenomena are streets, houses, Vitosha Mountain and the mineral springs, whilst intangible phenomena include the traditions and values that belong to the place, the city.

Historically, cities were grounded in a quasi-symbiotic relationship between their physical and psychological parameters. Examples of this are the settlements along the Nile in ancient Egypt and the location of ancient Greek cities in the Balkan Peninsula. Looking at the map of Southeast Europe, the position of Sofia is significant; its location is delineated by Vitosha Mountain and the mineral springs, which in turn strengthen the feeling of boundary. These tangible phenomena are the eternal environmental parameters of the city which not only impact its orientation but also its identity. Their impact on the city’s character is felt not only in its physical setting but also through its psychologically loaded setting. Eternal symbolic parameters of tangible phenomena in Sofia include the surviving places of worship, a focus of universal sacredness. In these places of worship, the Bulgarian character stands out; they form an important psychic centre of the city. These places have been significant to the consciousness of the city through the centuries; they represent a value-laden expression of complex social interactions. Bulgarian values make the spiritual life of Sofia possible; the objectives of the contemporary masterplan⁵⁰ merely deal with the material life of the city. This plan takes account of the economic, social and psychological transformations

⁴⁷ Norberg-Schulz 1980, p. 18.

⁴⁸ SofProject 2004; SofProject 2009.

⁴⁹ Norberg-Schulz 1980, p. 5.

⁵⁰ SofProject 2004; SofProject 2009.

experienced in the shift from the controlled to the free-market model⁵¹ but does not address the city's existential nature.⁵²

Conclusions

The design and development of Sofia represent a great challenge. Its position remains unique although its urban planning is not. Its uniqueness is vested in both its geophysical position and in its cultural psyche. The former has been addressed in urban planning over the past century-and-a-half, a trend which extends into the future spatial planning agenda. Yet its cultural psyche was not tackled.

The city lies along the ancient route through Central Europe from the Adriatic to the Black and Aegean Seas. Vitosha Mountain, the numerous mineral and thermal springs and the low flowing rivers are eternal geophysical features of the city. This unique strategic position means the city lies on three of the five Trans-European Transport Corridors; it is a major factor that propels the city's future socio-economic and spatial development.⁵³

Exploiting and applying the notion of townscape to urban design philosophy was an approach to urban planning proposed by Gordon Cullen.⁵⁴ It further develops Ivor de Wolfe's idea of townscape; he proposed a visual art of town planning which highlights "character" and significant differentiation.⁵⁵ This representation of experience has been the inspiration for drafting the current heritage and planning policies for Sofia in line with planning practices elsewhere and in agreement with the relevant EU directives. Current planning policies address cultural heritage which can be quantified but ignore cultural values, the psyche underling social existence. These values, although evolving over time, represent the unique living heritage of Sofia that has survived to date. Applying such a philosophy to the contemporary masterplan for Sofia⁵⁶ would result in the effective, balanced, sustainable development of the city based on a philosophy grounded in the spirit of time and place.⁵⁷ This plan addresses the production and, where applicable, the reproduction of space. Sofia is a unique city and thus a unique concept is required, a concept which addresses the soul of the city, its heritage, and its people.

⁵¹ Troeva 2002, p. 121–126.

⁵² During the preparation of the masterplan for Sofia, a visual and cityscape analysis was undertaken by Todor Bulev. It was later published in his two-volume book, in Bulgarian, entitled *Landscape Architecture* (Bulev 2010).

⁵³ METREX 2006, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Cullen 1971.

⁵⁵ De Wolfe 1949, p. 355–362.

⁵⁶ SofProject 2004; SofProject 2009.

⁵⁷ For an outline of the urban planning strategy the development of Sofia, see Bianco 2024.

Acknowledgments

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⁵⁸ Bianco 2022b.

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