

**Donnerstag, 25. August – STADT IM SPANNUNGSFELD ZWISCHEN
INVESTORENINTERESSE UND ÖFFENTLICHER ADMINISTRATION**

19:00: Milla Mineva (Kulturwissenschaftlerin, Sofia): „Wildes Verlangen nach dem Kapitalismus“

Conceiving Sofia as a Sight*

Herein I will try to analyse the production of images constructing Sofia as a tourist sight. The presentation will be centred on the representations of the city through which it is trying to attract, tempt the eye. My main assumption is that the imaginary views on Modernity that have shaped the city's identity can be reconstructed through these very images. The analysis will focus on various genre types of representations trying to elicit the links or interruptions between them. Throughout the presentation I will move, on the one hand, from more structured and discourse-oriented visions of the city to more unsystematic ones, from jubilee books through albums to postcards. On the other hand, I will interpret the images of Sofia from three distinctly different historical periods – Sofia from the beginning of the 19th century, in the socialist era, and after 1989. In the historical narrative these periods seem radically different from each other and create a sense of discontinuity. I will attempt to argue such obviousness, my main assumption being that images of Sofia will be more sustainable than tales of it, although it is at the background of this detail that specific features in the self-representations of the city can be analysed.

There are two deviations in the thus announced text from the studies of Sofia conducted heretofore. The first one is the focus of the study on city representations, on the visual production of Sofia. The second one is the focus on images that turn the city into a tourist sight. Delimiting the text in this manner implies that the historical, demographic and other references for the change of urban milieu itself are external to the analysis, i.e. the study is exclusively centred on the city representation rather than on its composition as a city.

* „Sofia as a Sight“: Titel des Projekts der Soziologin Milla Mineva im Rahmen des StipendiatInnen-Programms des Visual Seminar, April – September 2003.

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Images as a cognitive tool

Turning the image into part of the cognitive toolkit of social sciences begins around the 1950s-1960s. Although it was much earlier that Benjamin starts analyzing the process of visualization as the core one for Modernity and works on his project "Passageways of Paris" in which image is the key to understanding the "capital of the 19th century". It is as a re-reading of Benjamin that the visual becomes a subject matter of critical theories in the 1950s. On the other hand, the trend of turning the world into an image becomes evident by then and there are attempts for re-interpreting Modernity as a process of visualising the world (Jay 1994, Schwartz 1998). As Don Slater writes, the basic philosophic texts for her have attributed the status of truth to the visual, they have cleaned the world of its depth and turned it into a sight (Slater 1995: XXI8-238).

This allows us to speak of already late Modernity, when this process is already complete, through the term "visual culture". It is in the field of the image that this culture is trying to "attribute some sense to the unlimited domain of reality by selecting, interpreting and representing this reality" (Mirzoeff 1999). In this sense the study of Sofia representations allows us to analyse the paradigms of seeing, on the one hand, as well as the visual codes through which sense is attributed to the city milieu. If we recollect the tenet of James Donald that the city can be interpreted as a "historically specific way of seeing, a structure of the visible" (Donald 1995:92), then it is the representations of the city as a postcard that can serve as the object through which these historically constructed ways of seeing can be interpreted.

The tourist practice as a cognitive tool

The end of the 19th century marks the beginning of scientific interest in tourist practice in Europe. The possibility that the tourist can become subject of scientific studies is mainly due to the fact that in the 19th century tourism expands to mass practice. The young English aristocrats who undertook long travels around Europe to complete their cultural education at the beginning of the 19th century were the first ones to be called tourists (see Rifkin 2001: 158). Less than a century later tourist travels become affordable for middle and working class families. Despite this impressive development until the 1970s science classifies the studies of tourist practice in its margins. According to Dean MacCannell who issued the first book on sociology of tourism in 1976 the very adjective "touristic" enters the English as late as 1977 (MacCannell 1999: 189). It is his book that is considered a turning point of the perspective in which tourism is construed. Dean MacCannell starts examining the tourist practice as a modern phenomenon and the tourist as an image of "modern-man-as-an-entity" (MacCannell 1999: 1). This gives an opportunity for this practice to be taken out of the sphere of the marginal and to be construed as a cognitive tool allowing the specific features of Modernity to be understood. In this sense the study of tourism as well as of tourist industry is turning into a study of Modernity on a smaller scale; a tourist becomes interesting not per se but as a paradigmatic modern man. It is in this scientific paradigm that the historically formed various tourist practices can be viewed so that differences between early and late Modernity can be mapped out. If we look at the tenets of MacCannell we can recreate the ideal type of modern tourist practice. First, he regards it as a cultural practice of supplying authenticity.

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This implies several things, viz.: certain places start to be constructed as representative authentic places and on the other hand to be conserved in their particular "authentic" form. Tourist travel is actually the practice that makes evident on the daily level the "conception of tradition" as a reflex of Modernity. On the other hand, certain places are conceived as representative of contemporaneity, i.e. as "authentic Modernity" and that is how tourist destinations become popular¹. In its origins tourism develops as an educational journey on the one hand, and on the other – as constructing the modern identity of the traveller. If we place the ideal type of tourist practice described above in the historical perspective of late modernity we will see some re-writings of the modern ideal type. If modern travel is linked to education and that is the reason why institutions of the museum type or the "authentic" open craft parks are developed, the postmodern tourist turns more to entertainment on the one hand, and to the experience, on the other (see: Rifkin 2001). Inasmuch as late Modernity is an epoch with no great tales, the metanarratives of Modernity are no longer of interest and therefore the institutions of the museum type, which are their direct corollary, start changing their functions. The postmodern tourist practice is not aiming at discovering authenticity as cultural legacy but rather strives to experience various daily practices. On the other hand, the difference is in the very experience of the places, which is not of the order of the didactic, but rather of the interesting, the serious is supplanted by the play-like.

Hand in hand with reviewing the practice of tourism, the tourist industry is raised as a topic to be studied. The latter deals both with producing the places and producing their images. This is why in Foucault's paradigm John Eyrice talks about the tourist outlook as produced and mainstreamed by the institutions of the tourist industry. "Looking" in its analysis is the underlying basic tourist practice turning the reality into a sight. In this perspective it is tourism again that is underpinning an example of Modernity par excellence, as the practice which has allowed each modern man to experience this process of visualising the world in his daily round. Places start producing images of themselves through which they attract the tourist's eye, to fit into the map of modern world.

Sofia through the Jubilee books

In my analysis I am using three Jubilee books produced in the different historical periods. The first one, published in 1928, marks the 50th anniversary of the capital, the second one – the 80th anniversary, and the third one – the 120th anniversary. None of these periods has seen the publication of more than a single Jubilee book. It is symptomatic that the books mark the anniversaries of Sofia as a capital. Even if there is historical information of the city as being centuries old, its true chronology seems to start with its proclamation as a capital. The genre of Jubilee books implies, on the one hand, celebration, and on the other – a recapitulation. They are targeted more at Sofia citizens or Bulgarians who should recognise the capital as representative for the state. In this sense the image of Sofia directed at the internal addressee can be reconstructed in Jubilee books and they produce the city identity that will be striving for acknowledgement. On the other hand, it is through the Jubilee books that the representation of Sofia can be interpreted as more structured inasmuch as it already appears as fragmentary in postcards.

¹ An example of such a representation are the symbols that remain after International Exhibitions, the most famous being the Eiffel Tower.

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“It grows but does not age”

The motto of Sofia seems to set the basic discourse framework in which the city is being narrated in 1928. It is through the narrative of the demographic, territorial and civilization development that the symbolic wealth of the city as a capital is formed. Sofia is constructed in the first Jubilee book as “the first city in Bulgaria in terms of influx of population and boost of its citizens” (p.63)²; parallel to this rise, the buildings rise, too – Sofia becomes already 4-5-floor buildings tall. Within 50 years it has turned into the most modern city in Bulgaria. “... the city of Sofia has undergone a complete change with regard to its physiognomy. It is already a big city, an important crossroad of railways, planned in a modern way, with a water-supply system, sewerage, electric lighting and electric trams. ... Around the Palace a “City” has developed as in all big cities.” (p.73)

On the one hand the quoted excerpt shows the desired image of Sofia in 1928 but on the other, it reveals the double problems it faces after the Liberation. On the one hand its city status is problematic, on the other – its capital status. According to memories of the contemporaries it is obvious that Sofia was not a real town. Konstantin Irecek quotes Vazov who had said that “it is but a big village, just a big Berkovitsa.”³ If a real city had to be selected as capital of the new state, it obviously should have been Turnovo or Plovdiv. In a letter from Plovdiv, after lamenting the lack of patriotism among Plovdiv residents, Grigor Nachovich writes: “Sofia – make her beautiful, stir up her citizens who are at least not hostile to their mother country even if they say that they are lagging behind, and let Sofia become the Bulgarian capital”⁴. As regards Turnovo, a proposal supported by the Austrian diplomacy, Dragan Tsankov, the Vice Governor of Turnovo at the time wrote: “Let God bring Bulgarians to their senses so that they do not support the motion for Turnovo becoming capital. I have told you before that you are happy to be among a population that is not the Turnovo one.”⁵

With all said heretofore I am just trying to demonstrate than no matter what the reasons were for selecting Sofia as a capital, the urbanity of the place is not among them. Thus one of the images which Sofia is trying to hide is that of the “big village”. And the other one is that of the Oriental city. Again after Irecek’s memories the houses and workshops are oriental, and this is how he describes the National Assembly: “a big wooden building of the type erected for livestock exhibitions at home, all covered in small flags. This must be the National Assembly”⁶. In this sense the identity of Sofia is happening through two comparative perspectives – to other Bulgarian towns and to other European capitals. There are distinctly different urban policies defining the image of Sofia and made legitimate through these two perspectives. One of the policies is that of transforming Sofia into a city, at least on a par with Turnovo or Plovdiv. The other one – the policy which would turn Sofia into a European capital. The first policy is related rather to the urbanisation of the city, the second one – to its high profile.

² All quotations are after the Jubilee books of the city of Sofia (1878 – 1928) 1928. Printing house ‘Knipegraph’ Inc., Sofia.

³ The Capital Sofia, 1999, S., p. 13.

⁴ The Capital Sofia, 1999, S., p. 6.

⁵ The Capital Sofia, 1999, S., p. 9.

⁶ The Capital Sofia, 1999, S., p. 14.

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In this sense buying gas lanterns for Sofia streets – the first move of the first Sofia Mayor – is legitimised through the comparison with other Bulgarian towns. The electrification of street lightning is part of the other policy – for benchmarking with European capitals (Sofia was electrified in 1900, actually earlier than some European capitals). Hand in hand with the policies of turning Sofia into a European city starts the conception of city symbols. First, the coat of arms of Sofia is designed on the occasion of the World Exhibition in Paris 1900. The organisers of the Exhibition ask to be sent the coat of arms of the Capital to exhibit it along with those of other capitals of the participant countries. Then the Mayor, Hr. Popov, together with Mrkvicka, Director of the Painters' school, and Dobrouski, Director of the Archaeological Museum assign its design to Haralampi Tachev. In the words of the author of the coat of arms himself "This way Sofia took its place among the ranks of other European capitals."⁷. Again imitating Europe, the motto of Sofia has been worded reminiscent of the motto of Paris. Thus, on the one hand, urban policies change the very milieu of the city but this happens slowly and unevenly. On the other hand, representations of Sofia display these policies as ones that have already occurred. In the Jubilee book of 1928 an image of Sofia is created as an already European and capital city. It is in this capacity that its depiction does not omit a single detail and Sofia in this book seems a bustling and dynamic city. Not only the novelties in the city milieu are described but also special emphasis is laid on Sofia residents.

"In vain would one seek the typical characteristic features of the capital's resident, his manners and customs, because they are shaped in the provincial towns." (p. 294)

This is the introductory sentence to that part of the book which should discuss residents of the capital. But this is only a seeming refusal to depict them. This refers rather to introducing a story about a new type of specific features, i.e. not about mores and customs, but rather about daily modern practices. That is why the text is verbose in describing the strolls, beer halls and cafes, cultural events and the lectures which have become commonplace, charity events and "community life". The major image created is that of modern daily round, infinitely dynamic and open to innovations. Perhaps this is partly the reason why, in order to depict Sofia as a real cosmopolitan city the text lists in the ranks of Sofia residents the numerous foreigners residing in the capital, they are staged as part of its life and turn it into the most multi-coloured city in Bulgaria in ethnic terms.

"[...] the most beautiful and modern city of Bulgaria has little in common with Sofia of 50 years ago" (p. 69). This is the summary image of Sofia which the Jubilee book of 1928 constructs. I would like to highlight here several aspects in the logic of this representation. The main source of city identity, but also a symbolic capital of Sofia is its own contemporaneity. The Jubilee book contains a return to Serdika and Sredets but it is of the order of archaeological interest and is not mythologized to be turned into a symbolic resource. Much more powerful is the vision of the just constructed Sofia. The other important moment is the thrust back from the non-urban which can manifest itself not only in the attire but also in lifestyle and celebration.

⁷ The Capital Sofia, 1999, p. 39.



From this point of view the national costumes or the former village fairs are hidden, banned with a Mayor's decision or reprovved as conservative. What is presented is European Sofia citizenship, the new modern architecture and contemporary city festivities. If there is a period in Bulgarian history which calls itself the New Time, it is this one. Or at least that is the image it wanted to convey.

A city meant for the people

The Jubilee book of Sofia issued at the time of socialism does not create the feeling of discontinuity in the logic of presentation even though the text explicitly speaks of cutting the link with the "capitalist" city. In fact, this is a narrative along the lines of the first Jubilee book. The way the book of 1928 talks about a radical rupture with the aspect of Sofia "in Turkish times", the socialist city in the book of 1958 is constructed as rejecting the image of the previous period. Only those negative features of the city which are set in its nearest past are reconstructed retrospectively. If Sofia as a newly established capital is proud of its urban development plans because of their very existence as pushing it away from the oriental city and turning it into a modern European one, socialist Sofia accepts these plans as a matter of fact and criticizes them contentwise. Simply at that stage the existence of a plan is no longer sufficient, the important thing is what the plan is. This is just an example trying to show that despite the differentiation on the level of contents, discoveries of the previous period have become self-evident facts of city milieu and its representations. The other sustainable place in the tale of Sofia is the narrative about its growth⁸. Each period adds a new boost of the population, new boost of the buildings, new boost of civilisation assets. The second important aspect in the representations of Sofia which continues from the previous period is its presentation as a capital⁹. The simultaneous construction of Sofia status as a city and capital is an important part of the process of shaping city identity. Sofia should symbolise both the city and the state at the same time. It should simultaneously construct representative places as a city – for instance a Town Hall, but also as a capital – National Assembly or King's Palace. The case with the New centre built in the 1950s is paradigmatic. It is simultaneously the new city centre but also the new centre of the capital, i.e. of the state and should sustain both these symbolic perspectives. According to the project (the books from this period present the project as a virtual stroll round the centre of Sofia) the dominant building in this set is the City Council House (it should be opposite the Party House thus closing the square). According to the plan it is the highest and should visually command this space. This part of the project, however, remains virtual. Instead, the Party House is build which should be domineered by the City Council but evolved to be more important than it. The domination of the city of Sofia over the capital Sofia in the visual representation of the city is all too obvious. The repeat images are those of the National Assembly, the Presidency, the Party House. The Town Hall is invisible. This point in the construction of Sofia as both city and capital at the same time, as I was trying to show, is important since its very beginning.

⁸ This narrative will also appear in the Jubilee book of 2000

⁹ This aspect is no longer discussed in the third Jubilee book.

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Ever since the first Jubilee book it has been important that the image of Sofia should present the project for Bulgaria as accomplished. That is why the book ends with the following sentence: "It leads Bulgaria" (305). There is an even bigger emphasis on this leading function of Sofia in the Jubilee book of 1958 and it is attributed to the city back in its historic past. At the backdrop of the common features, the specific aspects in the socialist type of representation of Sofia are starting to emerge here. The first one is the addition of a past. Retroactively Sofia is constructed as an important city centre, its history starting from the Paleolithic Age, and the archaeological interest for the past is transformed into a prerequisite for understanding the present. A whole chapter of the Jubilee book under the title "The new in old Sofia" is dedicated to the archaeological discoveries made during the new people's power. Actually this is the way in which the past is turned into a symbolic resource of the new power and it stages itself specifically as preserving history. At the background of this narrative the repeat images of Sofia become easy to explain. The socialist vision of the city does not discard any of the old images despite placing them in a new context. The Jubilee book contains photos of most churches which are considered representative of Sofia even today; the architectural emblems from the early 20th century are presented, as well as the synagogue and the mosque or the Turkish wall (known as the Roman wall today) as representative of various cultural practices in these lands. Naturally they are in the "Remnants of the past" section but they nevertheless enrich the life and image of the city.

If there is any radical novelty in the representation of Sofia in this period, it is the construction of a "new social image of the city" (p. 88)¹⁰. This social image is visualized on several levels. First some buildings become visible which can turn into emblems of social assets, i.e. hospitals, polyclinics, childcare institutions, schools, stadiums. The second important aspect underscored by the Jubilee book is the care taken by the people's power for residential facilities. The book presents as completed residential quarters like "Zaimov" and plans for new "modern suburbs" as well as images from the process of building them. This is actually the only vision of Sofia which on the image level contains simultaneously the centre and the modernised¹¹ periphery of the town. The third aspect of the social image of the city is the staging of city milieu as people-focused. Sofia is turned in its representations as a "city meant for the people, for meeting its comprehensive needs" (p. 19). That is why the images reveal the city as cosy through photos staging a happy daily round.

¹⁰ The quotes are after: The Jubilee Book of the city of Sofia (1878 – 1958) 1958. Edition of publishing house of Sofia City People's Council.

¹¹ This is a way to underscore that the villages appended to Sofia which preserve their rustic image remain invisible.

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I will deviate from the Jubilee books here to show how Sofia is constructed in the albums of this period. I have chosen this point because first of all, albums exist only since the socialist time and secondly, because the comparison between them and the Jubilee book shows the difference between the images which have a distinctly internal addressee and those directed to the external one. The three albums I am reviewing¹² have only an introductory text of 2-3 pages in Bulgarian, Russian, German, French and English, followed by an exclusively photographic presentation of Sofia. The text at the beginning of the albums always highlights that a city is above all its residents. This is illustrated by photos. The vast majority of them place people in their centre, and most buildings have been photographed from the perspective of the passer-by. The way photos in these albums are arranged is very indicative for the representation of Sofia in this period. The structure is the same (in terms of contents, the images are the same, too). At the beginning it seems that the photos construct a historically consistent vision – a panoramic bird’s eye picture of the city and then enter it through various archaeological remains. After the initial 3-4 pictures, history is abandoned altogether to display the “Centre.” Actually the first photos show cultural heritage but they are incorporated in the city milieu, not in the city life. From the centre through “busy crossroads” one enters into the daily round of Sofia citizens staged as modern, a leisure section follows, and then the Central Railway Station or the Airport. It seems the album determines the route, offers a recipe for moving around town. It is trying to tempt the external eye, showing a practice of residing in this town. The album is visualizing the ideology for socialist Sofia – a city of the people which reflects the life of working people in the socialist state – both business and festive.” (Mitov 1954: 20). That is why the city is staged as human in the daily practices at work and leisure, as a modern, busy town (the abundance of cars highlights this), but “green” and cosy, focused on its residents. The most sustainable metaphor is that of the garden. The names of boulevards are doubled with botanical names – the boulevard of roses, of poplars, of chestnuts... Sofia is constructed as a pleasant city to reside in, with cafes around the squares, restaurants in the open, and Indian rubber plants on the beach. Happy young people are strolling around, sitting on benches, children are playing. This does not mean that the ideological perspective is missing, that the leading role of the Party is not visible. It means that it is rather implicit as the background against which all this is happening. An indicative photo in this respect is the one of the Brothers’ mound. Nothing in the title of the photo – “A sip of cold water”- implies that it is this monument that is shown. The centre of the foreground is focused on small children who are drinking water. Far in the distance but by far the highest is the towering Brothers’ mound; slightly out of focus but simply standing there with children at its base. The picture makes visible the ideology “in the name of the people”.

¹² Pomadova, V., M. Stancheva and S. Ignatievski (compilers) 1959. *Sofia*, State publishing house ‘Naouka I izkoustvo’, Sofia; Severniak, S. (compiler) 1967. *Sofia – capital of the People’s Republic of Buglaria*, State publishing house ‘Naouka I izkoustvo’, Sofia; Gergov, S. and G. Ouzounski (compilers) 1975, *Sofia*, State publishing house ‘Septemvri’, Sofia.

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The albums show what it means for a city to be people-focused, to have a social image albeit only in one of its aspects. The hospital and the school are images for the internal addressee; the stroll, garden, boulevard of roses are the images to lure the external one. They are the ones to ensure the acknowledgement of Sofia as a "city meant for the people".

Past imperfect

The Jubilee book of Sofia of 2000 has several modes of existence. It has been published in Bulgarian and English and at the same time it is uploaded at the website of the Municipality. In this sense the image of Sofia which it constructs is not turned necessarily to the internal addressee. Just the opposite, its message is multi-targeted. This Jubilee book on the one hand is extremely informative. It contains all the possible data on Sofia. If we look at its contents and count only the purely informative text contained in it, we will see that it is about 80 pages long. If we add those parts which contain historical information – about 450 pages – we will nearly reach the full volume of the book. The only thing that remains is to add the political and ritual addresses at the beginning, as well as the dozen or so pages devoted to the image of Sofia after 1989. In this sense, on the other hand, apart from the informativeness, this Jubilee book constructs a very coherent image of Sofia from its past. Actually we can talk here about the return to the past as a sustainable form in the representations of the city. On the one hand we have the reflex for hiding the immediately preceding period (about 30 of the 450 pages are referring directly to socialist time), and on the other – an enhancement of the past. Sofia in this Jubilee book looks like an archaeological museum. No remnant or fibula discovered in these lands has been overlooked. These archaeological remains, however, are strongly dominated by the Christian image of Sofia. On the visual level the city looks like an orthodox-religious centre. This certainly does not mean that the book contains no image of a mosque, for instance. Just the opposite, it is politically correct and reproduces such images, too. But we have to specifically look for them while Christian tokens strike us in the face. It is not just about presenting Sofia through the churches located on the city territory but about "attention to detail", "discovering beauty" in each fresco and each icon. This is a new type of presentation of the Middle Ages. And Sofia from the 1920-30s and the time of socialism uses several churches as emblems – St. Nedelia, Alexander Nevski Cathedral, the Rotunda of St. Georgi, St. Sofia. But the church is usually presented from the outside, the way it is present in the city milieu. In this Jubilee book of 2000 the interior of the churches becomes a part of the city image. The images insist that the passer-by walks in as if part of the identity of Sofia residents consists of going to church, appreciation of Christian art. The second very powerful image constructed in the book is that of Sofia from the beginning of the 20th century. More than three hundred pages show and tell about Sofia in the period from 1978 to 1944 in all possible details. The city looks alive, changes its image, the buildings become new, the streets – paved.

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The city becomes civilized, divests itself of its oriental look. And so do its residents – they change their clothes, lifestyle, the interior of their houses. Sofia is presented simultaneously in its daily existence but also in its festivities – both public and personal. The images present beer-halls, cafes, the Celebration of the Rose, tram, cars, fashion, etc. The vision is complemented by memories of contemporaries, their tales in archaic Bulgarian about their own time. Apart from the authentic photos reproduced in abundance in the book a multitude of modern photos are published of buildings representative of this period of the history of Sofia. It is important to underline here that this vision of the city produces certain urban policies such as funds allocation under the Beautiful Bulgaria project. So powerful is the presence of this city image that a feeling is created of not just identification with it; it is turned into the real face of Sofia. Everything that happened after it is only going further away from the essential time of Sofia. Just as an example I would quote the chapter called “The First Ones.” It tells in detail about the first electric bulb that lit the streets of Sofia, the first tram, the first bicycles, motorbike, automobile, etc. Nothing in the title of the Chapter implies that “the first things” would only be found in the period of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom, yet a series of civilisation acquisitions that happened afterwards have been overlooked – the first trolley without a conductor, the first computer, the first website of Sofia Municipality. In this hypertrophied image of Sofia from the beginning of the 20th century the continuity of history and construction of the present is problematic. The obliteration of the previous period, as I already showed, is a sustainable point. And the period of socialism does not disappear completely. It remains with the National Palace of Culture, the former Party House, the Central Department Store, Hotel Balkan, which have already taken on their new functions and are presented with new names. In the text this period has been normalised and turned into part of the history of architecture, theatre, etc. It is more curious how the present is included in this Jubilee book. On the one hand, it is a collection of data inherent in the discourse of growth and the rounding up of figures – 120 years of being capital, 54-time expansion of the city, etc. The vision which this present exudes is problematic. On the one hand, these are the new monuments of Sofia – of Sofia, of the Slaveikovs, the fountain at Slaveikov Square. These monuments are extremely symptomatic. These are images hidden by the present¹³. Nothing in the monument of Sofia makes it distinctly recognisable as produced at the beginning of the 21st century. In this sense I would define this manifestation of the present as an imitation of a phantasmal past today. The second image through which the present is constructed is that of the “modern buildings” – made of fibreglass, with clear constructions, photographed to look towering above the rest. They turn into a sign of the ‘process of changes whose intensiveness can only be compared to the “Europeization” of the country after the Liberation...’¹⁴.

¹³ I allow myself to quote here Nedko Solakov who qualifies them as ‘terrifyingly archaic’.

¹⁴ Jubilee book, Sofia – 120 years capital 2000. Academic publishing house ‘M. Drinov’, S, p. 545.

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Sofia as a postcard

Susan Sontag starts her book on photography with a story of Ulysses and Michelangelo from Godard's film "Les Carabiniers" (The Riflemen) who bring their wives suitcases full of loot which turn out to be full of postcards (Sontag 1999). From here Susan Sontag starts her contemplation on photography as a form of appropriating the world. The contemplation, however, can continue in another direction – towards the genre of the postcard and not so much on the essence of photography. Incidentally, "Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain (Amélie from Montmartre)" completes this possibility to ponder upon the difference between the two genres. In this film Amélie, through a friend of hers who is an air-hostess, sends her father not postcards of various places signed by the garden dwarf but photos of the dwarf at tourist landmarks. The photo of myself underlines my presence; the postcard rather testifies the presence of the tourist site at its paradigmaticity. The postcard of the Eiffel tower is not simply showing its existence, it presupposes the ways it should look and the way I should see it. In this sense I am talking of paradigmaticity here. The postcard gives a set of views as well as a set of practices ensuring the right use of the tourist site. Thus Ulysses and Michelangelo, bringing postcards, steal the "existence" of the sites, but also the paradigm of seeing them. The first painted postcards in Bulgaria have usually been produced by foreign publishers. Later on local photographers start publishing postcards. There is a very peculiar practice of turning personal photos into postcards. After World War I the publishing house for postcards is monopolised by Grigor Paskov who sends out photographers throughout Bulgaria to systematically take photos of Bulgarian cities¹⁵. At any rate sending postcards in this period has already become a mass practice, on the one hand, and on the other, one can already talk of sustainable images of cities.

Images in present continuous

In this fragment of the text I will try to outline those signs of Sofia which appear at the beginning of the 20th century and continue their signatory role into the 21st century. The first acknowledged emblems of Sofia are the National Assembly, the monument of the Tsar Liberator, the National Theatre, St. Nedelia Square, and slightly later the Alexander Nevski Cathedral also takes its place among the sustainable images of the city. These are simply the most frequently used images. There are others, of course, which are also inscribed into this present continuous of the vision such as the University or the Military Club. Using these particular images at the beginning of the 20th century constructs a synchronic vision of Sofia. These are some of the first erected buildings after the Liberation. Most of them have been designed by European architects or architects who graduated in Europe. In this sense a milieu is constructed along with producing the image of a European city. The architecture which has been selected as representative can be recognised as Central European one. Those buildings which present a return to Byzantine cultural heritage have also been preserved as common places in the representation of Sofia.

¹⁵ According to Mihail Nedelchev – one of the eminent postcard collectors – this practice leads to normalisation and standardisation of the local (a personal conversation).

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The Covered market, the Bath, the Seminary can be seen on postcards from any period but they never take on the status of tokens of Sofia, i.e. postcards seldom place them at their centre, they are present rather as a context, background to another central image. These buildings in baroque, neo-roman or neoclassical style erected at the beginning of the 20th century are the signs in which the city is sustainably recognised regardless of the historical period and they are available on postcards. This long-lasting present of the signs, however, is only valid for the objects which are photographed but not for the way they are staged. The buildings are the same but the paradigms of seeing are different.

The National Assembly is the first public building erected in Sofia and it has turned into a sign of this environment. Since the beginning of the 20th century postcards have been focused on its premises as if taking them out of their context. On the other hand, this is only removal from the context of the other buildings¹⁶ because people can usually be seen around the National Assembly or at its entrance. It is presented as a building which is symbolically signatory by itself but it is because of the life, because of the actions, because of the people who are in or around the National Assembly. The image constructed during the time of socialism is totally different. The building is completely contextualised. In the foreground there are often moving cards, people passing by, mothers with baby carriages. The most curious postcard of the National Assembly is the one where its photo is taken from the perspective of a person sitting in the café opposite it. This type of cards show the ideology of the "city with a focus on people" mentioned earlier. On the other hand, these postcards do more than that. The focus here is on the things which happen past this symbolically important building inasmuch as it presents the national milieu, but the premises themselves are only background to a daily "Dolce Vita." This representation of the National Assembly shows on a visual level the bracketing of the respect for the institution National Assembly, on the one hand, but on the other, the decline from tempting the external look through institutional visions. Socialism is trying to attract through the mundane, it wants acknowledgement of the "socialist life" from the external addressee; the acknowledgement of the socialist institutions might be reserved for the internal addressees. A third type of staging of the same place is presented by the postcards after 1989. The National Assembly here is at the centre of the postcard. Even if the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences can be seen, in terms of composition the focus is on this building; often the official entrance to the building is displayed at close range. What is extremely different is the purging of the pictures of all forms of life, of movement past or towards Parliament. Actually this type of staging of the buildings is very typical of the "transitory" period of Bulgaria. All the buildings are rendered aseptic, clean, and aesthetic. There is not a trace of the time when these buildings were photographed. There is no car or garments whose style can suggest the period. These buildings from the beginning of the 20th century have already been recorded in the 21st century not from the position of their presence but from the point of view of eternity, i.e. of the space without time.

¹⁶ Of course after their construction because in the beginning there were simply no other buildings around.

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Even through this type of staging of the buildings some attitudes of seeing the world can be discerned containing sustainable emblems which are the important ones, as well as life occurring past them which, however, is ephemeral and does not deserve attention. The images of Sofia through this staging seek acknowledgement of institutions, acknowledgement of eternity but not of the present or the contemporaneity.

The disappearing visions

The most amazing vision which disappears is that of monuments. Amazing, because a monument is made exactly in order to be a framework of the common memory. There are two monuments which persist – the one of the Tsar Liberator and, to some extent, the one of Levski¹⁷, all the rest disappear or their representation becomes so sporadic that they are not the signatory images of Sofia. In a sense Sofia has a single monument – that of the Tsar Liberator, a monument of the capital, not of the city, linked to the constituent act of this national milieu. The city has no memory. This vision is paradoxical. On the one hand the city is more and more represented through its past but on the other, it is a lot less represented through monuments capturing the memory of this past. Perhaps this is an explicable reflex inherent in the logic of constructing the image described above as obliterating the previous period. The previous one leaves just “remnants” but its memory, spirit, the places which served for symbolic validation by the community have not been preserved. The problem is why the image of these past monuments is not construed as interesting for an external addressee. On the one hand, perhaps they are so contextual of their time that the memory of them disappears, they become something that one does not even notice when passing by. On the other hand, it is possible to have exactly the opposite explanation. History is so much alive that the monument is a sign powerful enough to turn it into present. Because of this fear, it is better to deprive the city of a resource it might have in the eyes of the external addressee so as not to let loose the ghost of time. I would rather opt for the second interpretation because the disappearance of monuments from postcards is often accompanied by their disappearance from the city milieu and its saturation with new monuments which, if the tendency persists are doomed to extinction again in another 50 years or so.

The second disappearing vision of the city are its streets. The postcards from the beginning of the century contain images from all the central streets of Sofia which have managed to acquire a European look. The postcards from the time of socialism, creating the image of the city as modern also reproduce all the central streets and boulevards. On the one hand, they are evidence of dynamics and modern urban practices but on the other the image of the ‘city-garden’ is constructed through them. Each street has its own plant, and on the sidewalks under the trees, among the verdure there are benches, sitting citizens and playing children. The street constructed at the beginning of the 20th century is rather a space to stroll and move; the socialist street is a place to live and reside, and, only among other things, to walk on. The images of streets after 1989 almost vanish except in the night cityscapes of Sofia where they are used more as a lighting effect rather than image. It is impossible to see a postcard of a busy Sofia street. Except in one place – the website of the municipality.

¹⁷ I am saying *to some extent* because in the postcards after 1989 its representation becomes more and more rare.



It has a section called "E-cards" identical to the printed ones but there is also a "Photo Gallery" where each photo has an option to be sent as a virtual e-card. This is where several photos with real Sofia streets and squares can be seen. Albeit unprofessional¹⁸ these photos show a different modern vision of Sofia from the static and antiseptic vision I described above. Obviously this type of city representation is considered very specific – for Internet users, i.e. young and cosmopolitan people¹⁹. This vision would probably not appeal to the "conventional" tourist in Sofia. Just the opposite, it is strongly marked as a vision implying a special interest. It is this type of data that makes me interpret the representations of Sofia as ingrained and following the logic of a modern type of tourist practice and absolutely unacknowledged as legitimate postmodern tourist practices. That is why the focus in the images of Sofia has been placed on the cultural heritage implying an interest in enlightenment. The city is visualised as a museum collection with separate exhibits. In arranging this collection, the exhibits of architectural modernism in Bulgaria are left out. This type of heritage is presented very seldom and only with the Bulgarian National Bank building. In a sense this is rather a presentation of a national institution and it is signatory for the national milieu rather than for this type of cultural heritage. It is just dropped from the paradigm of the buildings from the first half of the 20th century that are transformed into a metonymy of the whole cultural heritage. On the other hand, this is not a disappearing but simply missing vision. None of the discussed historical periods lays an emphasis on architectural modernism. It is present as images only in the historical references to architectural styles in Bulgaria but does not manage to turn into part of the conception of the city.

The most comprehensive image of Sofia as a "city-garden" which continues from the beginning of the 20th century is starting to disappear in the time of socialism and is most acutely felt in the time of transition. The lack of parks staged earlier as part of the definition of modern city milieu is all too obvious. Not only do these images disappear, all allusions to nature fade away, too. Whereas 'Alexander Nevski' Cathedral from the time of socialism is framed by tree-crowns, in modern postcards it looks planted in an empty paved site. The problem is that such a vision of the city as a garden implies an emphasis on the life of this city. While modern postcards lay stress on the places themselves rather than on residing in the city. They create the most static image of Sofia, on the one hand, and on the other – the most officious one. All tourist places are staged as places of worship, not as places of experiencing. This image of the city seems to demand the acknowledgement of history, of cultural heritage but not on the lifestyles which are active in this city milieu. And the acknowledgement sought is that of history as a European one, at that. That is why those buildings are selected which can be recognised indisputably as pertaining to Central European architecture. Packaging certain places as interesting for the external eye constructs an image of Sofia as a museum of European history. It is interesting namely because it cannot be dissociated from the past of Europe. That is why the city is not staged as specific, there is no "Sofia-specific" architecture, "Sofia-specific" lifestyle, its specific nature is to be similar to Europe from the beginning of the 20th century.

¹⁸ I am citing Kiril Prashkov here.

¹⁹ The typical users of Internet in Bulgaria are like that.

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“It diminishes but ages”

Perhaps the anecdotic²⁰ story around the motto of Sofia has led to its bracketing by the vision of the city. The truth is that in it the city is perceptibly diminishing and aging. Initially²¹ postcards represent city milieu in its comparative entirety leaving out only the recently annexed villages. The two gateways can be seen – Eagles’ bridge and Lions’ bridge, the railway station through which the city can be entered, as well as Maria Louisa Boulevard leading to the central streets Rakovski and Targovska, and the buildings representative of the national milieu – the National Assembly, the King’s palace, the Warfare Ministry. The other parts of the city are also visible, marked by the Russian Monument and the monument of Levski. The whole modernised city milieu in this sense is represented in postcards. On the other hand, there is not a trace of the past in this presentation, i.e. it is obvious that Sofia not only does not age but grows younger and obliterates all signs of old age. In a sense such an image repeats in postcards from the 1960-80s. The emphasis in them is also laid on the modernity of the city even though it is already cohabiting with a Museum-like past. In this period previously modern buildings are already turned into signs of cultural heritage and therefore they are places around which the interest of the external eye is focused. Even those historical landmarks, however, have been staged as a background of modern city life. On the other hand in the postcards from this period the beginning of a tendency can be reconstructed for reducing the city to its representative centre. There are still postcards of the railway station as a gateway to the city and the visualized city milieu from the beginning of the century is thoroughly present as images in this period as well. From the point of view of city milieu, however, this is actually a shrinking of the city which has, in the meantime, expanded significantly and append new quarters to itself. They are present in the album representations of Sofia but absent from postcards. The vision which would turn Lyulin into an interesting place for the tourist has not been developed yet. Actually such an absence can be explained through the analysis of what Bulgaria wants to sell in this period. I have already shown through the analysis of more structured representations of Sofia that at the time of socialism it was not so much the socialist, i.e. the ideological-party image as the vision for ‘dolce vita’, in which ideology is but the background allowing this life to occur. That is why the new residential quarters constructing rather an image of socialist way of life are not staged as tourist places. They are more strongly ideologised by the vision with which socialism is trying to entice. The final transformation of the city motto takes place in the transition period. Postcards after 1989 not only shrink the city to its most high-profile centre but also obliterate the spaces between the representative buildings. The most amazing gap of this period is that of all the possible topoi where city practice can be seen. The city is transformed through its representation in architecture. From the late 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century a trend seems to take shape for bridging this gap since postcards appear displaying the book market on Slaveikov Square or the busy crossroads around the monument of Sofia but they are still only signs of a beginning making its way among architectural details.

²⁰ Initially the wording of the motto was ‘It grows, does not age’ which turned out to contain 13 letters. In order to overcome the fatality of the number the conjunction ‘but’ has been added.

²¹ This refers to the period 1920-30s.

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Apart from shrinking, the city is conspicuously aging in its representations. The postcards highlight buildings from the beginning of the 20th century that resemble Central European architecture. Actually the buildings are the same ones that can be seen on postcards from the beginning of the 20th century. Their production, however, in this context from the early 1990s changes their meaning – from signs of their time, they turn into emblems of the past and of cultural heritage.

Who is afraid of Sofia residents

A major place in the texts about Sofia is occupied by its residents but they are always present as problematic. Since the population grew mainly as a result of internal migration and not as a natural increase of the population in the city, the majority of city residents are always the one born outside Sofia and in this sense, a resident of Sofia cannot be defined through the place of birth, i.e. there is no resource of conceiving identity through origin. From this point of view new identity models have to be constructed which would allow people to identify with their city. Moreover, like most Bulgarian cities, Sofia is populated by many ethnic groups which undergo various movements. A massive part of the Turkish population migrates after the Liberation, the Roma community becomes the largest one after the Bulgarian one. The Bulgarian community itself, however, is not homogeneous. It consists of settlers from Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia - a division which texts assert. Unlike other Bulgarian cities, however, there are many foreigners in Sofia who form their own communities. The third problem for Sofia identity is related to the way the capital expands – it constantly annexes the neighbouring villages and yesterday's villagers turn into today's citizens. Hence not only Sofia identity is problematic, but also the citizen one. It is the desire to answer the question "What makes me a citizen?" that produces a certain number of policies after the Liberation. On the one hand, the demarcation and structuring of the markets, on the other – the pushing of traditional fairs to the outskirts of the city, the mere urbanisation policies – regulation plans, city development plans, improving the communications, etc. These policies are conducted not without a certain amount of violence on the part of municipal authorities and encounter strong resistance by citizens. Parallel to these policies a visible change in people's way of life is under way – their clothes change, and so do the holidays they celebrate, the interior of their houses, their leisure activities. The Jubilee book of Sofia of 1928 attests to these changes. One of the often-quoted facts which is valued positively is the change of fashion and the replacement of the national dress with civic type of clothes. There are stories of the gradual transformation of clothes, the attempts to change the national costume so that it starts to look like civic attire. In 1928 a certain Sofia lifestyle is already described as recognisable. On the one hand, this is a discourse description, but on the other – this is part of the vision of the city. The residents of Sofia like to stroll, ride a bicycle as part of their pastime, sit around in cafes – a lifestyle which is identified as Southern European. Postcards are full of such live details of the time – trams can be seen on Sofia streets, strolling people dressed after the latest European fashion, and the City Garden staged through the people is identical to the Luxembourg Garden in Paris. There is a postcard from this period which distinctly shows a different vision than that – people dressed in national costumes on Eagles' bridge.

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It is curious that in the Jubilee book of 1928 where this photo is reproduced it is used as an example of a vision from which the city has retreated. Today this particular photo is used as representative of this period and even turns into a photo-wallpaper of Sofia pubs. The frequency of its use shows the nostalgic look towards the time from the beginning of the 20th century which turns even the embarrassing images into likeable ones. It also attests to the re-interpretation of the city vision already in the logic of the national mythology constructed in the time of socialism where the folkloric turns into a source of pride and a synonym of high culture.

In the period of socialism the construction of a Sofia-specific way of life markedly persists, the connotation here being exclusively and only of a modern and urban lifestyle without explicit comparison with some European way of life. The main focus of Sofia life recognized through the leisure practices is identified with the stroll. When a new urban development plan was designed in the 1960s, new norms were set according to which everyone was entitled to 15 sq.m. of residential area and 50 sq.m. of green areas including Vitosha. The ideology of the stroll as a distinctive practice of Sofia residents leads to the image of Sofia as a "green city" but also to real policies of the type of creation and maintaining green spaces. According to photos of this epoch boulevards are much more than places for a walk than a "thoroughfare". As part of the so constructed way of life, albums and postcards are full of visions of gardens, Vitosha is a part and parcel of the vision of Sofia. Along with the verdure the image of water is produced. There is an abundance of photos depicting public and drinking fountains, and rivulets of Vitosha, respectively. The idea of a navigation canal of Sofia actually looks like the most natural thing at the background of its representation. Sofia lifestyle looks like an extension of the lifestyle of the pre-1944 period. The interior of cafes and restaurants has changed but the practice has endured. There are photos of open-air restaurants, on a meadow, by a lake; photos of the Milk Bar and covered restaurants. The strolls down Targovska or Rakovska Street carry on. There are photos of cultural consumption. There is only one photo of the Mausoleum in the album of 1967 but three photos of bookstores and three of people shopping. The ideologically constructed image of Sofia in this period presupposes as part of the city image the conception of a certain lifestyle. The text at the beginning of the albums always underscores that a city is above all its citizens. That is why the city is staged as human through daily practices of work and leisure as a modern, hectic city (the abundance of cars highlights that) yet 'green' and cosy, turned towards its citizens. The postcards allow that particular image of the city to be sent and preserved as a memory. There are purely ideological places of the type of the Party House which have more rarely been pictured from the point of view of the city residents, but most places are staged in this perspective. Open-air cafes can be seen in front of the buildings with people sitting on benches who are usually in the foreground. It is very indicative that those people are predominantly young and there is a distinct obsession with children that clearly attest to the future perspective dominating communist ideology.

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As democracy steps in, people's lifestyle disappears. Or rather, it is archived. The way residents of Sofia used to live 100-120 years ago turns into the representative and only represented lifestyle. The studies of this epoch are much more numerous. Actually this is the first point in time when residents of Sofia can safely recognize themselves and through which an ideology can be constructed serving to legitimize the present. The period of socialism is ideologically inadmissible but on the other hand, it is literally unknown just because it has been brought down to big ideological accounts which can conjure up the camps but leave out the daily life in their perspective inasmuch as it does not fit into weighty clichés. There are no studies providing insight on the life of Sofia residents during socialism but there is no interest in having them because this period has been marked as the time of forsaking European civilization. The lack of contemporaneity is problematic. There is not a single photo or story showing modern lifestyles. This absence can be interpreted from several perspectives. First, lifestyles have multiplied and cannot be reconstructed as something which unites and sets the identity of Sofia residents. They would rather distinguish Sofia residents from one another and this would bring to a crisis the process of shaping Sofia identity, i.e. there is no unproblematic common background against which they would look interesting. Second, the description of contemporaneity in the discourse of transition makes this contemporaneity bland. It is simply the time one goes through, i.e. the point of this contemporaneity is to be obliterated, to vanish in the achievement of the goal. The process is not conceived as interesting. The third problem before discovering the modern lifestyle of Sofia citizens is again related to the capital status of Sofia. If we can reconstruct the difference in lifestyles in Sofia and the rest of the cities, the main difference would be that lifestyles in Sofia are the most modernized, the most globalized, the most contemporary ones. According to demographic data the population in Sofia is younger than that in the rest of the country and according to polls the highest number of people using Internet, cultural consumption, travel, etc. is concentrated in Sofia, too. From this viewpoint the representation of Sofia lifestyles is blocked in two perspectives. The first one is that the conservative image of and discourse about Sofia is simply not recognising some of the modern lifestyles as legitimate since they do not refer to the past in any way. The second perspective is that the lifestyle is unrecognizable for the internal addressee as Bulgarian, i.e. it will not play the role of a lifestyle of the capital, representative of the whole national milieu. Again the need for Sofia to be staged as capital impedes the presentation of a specific city style. Several postcards are very indicative in placing people dressed in national costumes among the collages from Sofia buildings. The fact that they become representative for an urban milieu among rustic traditions is problematic but it can serve for conceiving a regional identity. Nothing of the kind can be detected in these postcards – people are not in costumes from the Shopska geographical area, and to make sure that these are nationally representative, and not city images, they are decorated with roses. In a sense the represented people are just as much signs of a national cultural heritage as the buildings among which they are placed. It is the obliteration of people as modern practices of dwelling from the postcards of this period that is the most distinct change in the representation of Sofia, and it is synchronised with the cleansing of the vision.

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The sight is conceived as the building staged in details but beyond any concept of time. Such a representation clashes with the real presence of the building in the city milieu where it is usually hidden by cafes, parked cars, stalls, etc.

It is this context of the building that was admissible at the beginning of the 20th century and desirable in the period of socialism. Our modern postcards do not just abstain from representing the residents of Sofia, they have been cleansed of dwelling practices to such an extent that they raise the question of who resides in this city at all. If we reconstruct the image of Sofia residents through postcards it will turn out that the real living inhabitants of the city are the buildings. They are alive through their details, they communicate among themselves in the collage of the postcard and even form special group identities. The other permanent inhabitants of city space are "Globul", "Elite", Sheraton, i.e. the advertising billboards of multinational companies. If Sofia from the beginning of the 20th century has been staged as a modern city through the variety of communities present in it, Sofia today looks modern only inasmuch as there is McDonald's, i.e. through the variety of companies present in the city. The summary image of Sofia is that of a museum city of the past whose present is an empty field expecting the signature of the Big Investor.

Sofia as a virtual Balkan city

Setting Sofia in the context of the Balkans is important as an opportunity to discover the "common aspects" of representations which turn cities into distinctly Balkan. My preliminary assumption was that the visions of Balkan capitals will be structurally the same, i.e. images will be different but they will display the same type of concept of the city, they will select typologically the same representative places and will have "common blind spots". To verify my assumption I selected several typologically representative capitals and analysed their representations in the official websites of their municipalities:

Athens as the most visible Balkan capital can be marked as the one setting a model in the region.

Bucharest as typologically representative for the voluntaristic construction of the city through imitation of Paris.

Skopje as an example of a politically constructed capital, i.e. forming the city as a capital occurs artificially through political will and not due to the logic of the urban milieu.

"A common aspect" in the construction of these capitals is the powerful emphasis laid on the past. In a sense Athens has really set the model of this presentation. The appropriation of Hellenic heritage and its over-exposure which allows Greece to be constructed as a "cradle of European civilization" is structurally repeated in the representations of the other Balkan capitals. They also choose a part of their past which dominates their visions. More important, however, is another similarity, viz. that of hiding. Athens to a great extent hides its Byzantine heritage.

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Byzantine churches are present in its website, of course, but in terms of quantity they are less numerous and are compiled in a separate section on "Byzantine heritage" unlike the Acropolis which is the indisputable emblem of the city. Bucharest has an extremely interesting site. It has several virtual cards in it which strongly resemble the postcards of Sofia in their aseptic vision and the bulky photo archive from the old centre destroyed during Ceausescu's time. As regards Skopje²² it looks like a religious centre and the focus in its representation is placed on the churches and on the new cross over Skopje built under Ljubco Georgievski's government, i.e. any idea for the multiethnic city is hidden. Through these examples a similarity can be discerned in the strategies in which these capitals are constructed. The issues which are a source of controversial interpretations and can thus create conflict are always hidden. The Byzantine heritage is problematic, it cannot be recognised unambiguously by the external addressee but its clear reading is barred for the internal addressee, too. The memory of Byzantium is traumatic because it always brings to mind the lack of Constantinople. This depiction through non-conflict topoi can be outlined as a clear strategy of Balkan capitals. The conflict is not addressed in any way. This is particularly visible when compared to the fundamentally different representation of Belgrade, which translates the controversy of the city into an asset claiming that one thing is certain – "it is never boring in Belgrade". The other Balkan capitals analyzed here, on the contrary, seem tedious because they shut the vision and are not constructed through images setting a margin for different readings. In a sense these capitals are too "slick" to be interesting. The construction of the Balkans as a field of conflicts (Todorova) sets the prerequisites for such type of tourist representations. It is with the opposite of expectations that they should entice and should construct the city as a place of tranquillity. That is why cities are buildings rather than lifestyles. In a sense the conception of the Balkans as "boring" is what is interesting. Besides, this type of representations show that the important "other" for the Balkans is still Europe. Each of the Balkan capitals is trying to present itself as recognisable by Europe, even rendering the city space exotic is going through European references. Athens is a "cradle", Bucharest – "little Paris", Sofia – "the past of Europe". There is not a hint in the visions of a common milieu which brings these capitals together beyond the shared space of Europe. There is no will for searching for such a common milieu. This is another argument for obliteration of daily practices which can demonstrate similarity, and render the capitals Balkan. Each of these capitals stages itself as part of a national but never regional milieu because the comparison is not occurring between them but beyond them – on the map of Europe.

²² Skopje has no website of its own but the city is presented at the official state website. That is why I have used postcards from Skopje as well.

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