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Working with the past, re-discovering cities of Central and Eastern Europe: cultural urbanism and new representations of modernist urban areas

Mikhail Ilchenko ^{a,b}

^aInstitute of Philosophy and Law of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Ural Branch), Yekaterinburg, Russia; ^bUral Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes how global processes that promote the homogenizing of urban cultural space influence the perception and representation of the past in Central and Eastern European (CEE) cities. Cultural urbanism perceives all urban heritage merely as a scene for creative experiments and new cultural industries. In CEE cities, characterized by a complex and contested history, a special attitude toward the past appears to be one of a typical feature. This situation poses a serious challenge to how global cultural urban processes play out in various regional contexts. It is evident that the dominant view on creative urbanism held within established neoliberal theoretical frameworks is too narrow to explain all its effects for the cities of CEE. How do new cultural projects focusing on the revitalization of urban heritage represent the complex pasts of CEE cities? Are they transforming their experience and emotional resonance? Do they even leave any kind of space for this past? Or, maybe, is this past disappearing in new discourses and symbolic meanings? In this paper, these questions are explored based on case studies showcasing the use of the 1920s and 1960s modernist architectural heritage in CEE cities.

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Introduction

A distinctive attitude toward the past is probably one of the fundamental characteristics determining the image and identity of Central and Eastern European (CEE) cities. Such a past may be an object of rejection, veneration, nostalgia or romantization – but, most importantly, it is always present here and now. For CEE cities, this presence is not reduced to a “retelling” or re-interpretation of the past (Graham and Nash 2000; Young and Kaczmarek 2008); rather, it forms a certain emotional experience of time and era – an experience that transcends historical assessments and re-encoding of meanings. The image of the past in CEE cities is

CONTACT Mikhail Ilchenko  msilchenko@mail.ru; ilchenko.mik@gmail.com  Institute of Philosophy and Law of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Ural Branch), Yekaterinburg, Russia, Kalinina Str., 8, app. 50, Yekaterinburg, Russia, 620012

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always already an image of endless transformations, radical changes, shifting social ideals, hopes and expectations, which captures elements from highly diverse historical periods: anticipation of a new life after the new independent nations were established in the aftermath of the First World War (Szczerski 2018; Žak 2018); sweeping modernist transformations of urban spaces in the 1920s–30s (Szczerski 2010; Kohlrausch 2019; Kudělka and Chatrný 2000); radical remaking of cities during the socialist era (Molnar 2013; Bartetzky, Dietz, and Haspel 2014); and new hopes and new pivotal changes of the post-socialist period (Stanilov 2007; Czepczyński 2010; Brade and Neugebauer 2017; Marzec and Zysiak 2020, this issue). It is no coincidence that, as time went by, the “Eastern” experience of urban development has become firmly associated in public consciousness with the most radical and ambitious projects and strategies (Meuser and Zadorin 2015; Lebow 2013; Hatherley 2016; Molnar 2013). The urban Eastern European past is continuously present in public discourse; it is experienced; it provokes emotional reactions and is reflected, in its various representations, within public space (Czepczyński 2008; Kinossian 2017; Dmitrieva and Kliems 2010).

In this respect, it is important to establish whether the perception and representation of the past in CEE cities are in any way influenced by processes which are producing a unification of urban cultural space and bringing new meanings to urban symbolic landscapes. Cultural urbanism views all urban heritage as a scene for creative experimentation and new cultural industries. However, for cities possessing difficult and contradictory heritages, these processes are particularly important, since they not only facilitate the “reviving” and “renovation” of urban space (Roberts, Sykes, and Granger 2016) but also drive their cultural and symbolical “re-codification” (Dmitrieva and Kliems 2010).

If it is increasingly accepted that development of CEE cities should be viewed as a “process sui generis” (Behrends and Kohlrausch 2014, 2) due to their “specific identity” (Purchla and Kusek 2017, 9), “temporal specificity” (Pope 2020, this issue) or “multicultural blending of memories” (Nistor 2017, 16) which distinguish them from the “Western” experience, then the course and outcome of global urban processes in the CEE context should also be examined under a special framework.

This situation poses a serious challenge, which concerns the understanding of global cultural urban processes from the perspective of various regional contexts. It becomes increasingly clear that what is usually treated today as a sort of local “side effect” or “by-product” of cultural urbanism, in fact, often appears to be its main outcome. Along with “revitalization” and “renovation”, cultural urban initiatives may trigger various processes in local urban contexts which require thorough analysis and particular attention. In this sense, it is no coincidence that recently more and more scholars have been trying to develop a methodological focus on different local patterns of global urban processes, either while studying the “diversity of urban contexts” (Parnell and Robinson 2012), the “provincialization” of global urbanism (Sheppard, Leitner, and

Maringanti 2013) or, for instance, the “multiple urban sites” of modernity (Roy 2009, 828). All of them, in one way or another, attempt to show that in order to understand the complexity of global urban processes, it is necessary to move beyond “Euro-American experience” (Roy 2009) and “northern” viewpoints on urbanization (Sheppard, Leitner, and Maringanti 2013). This leads to a rise of interest in urban practices in the Global South, but also calls into question the very binary of “Global North” and “Global South” in urban studies (Müller 2020; Ferenčuhová and Gentile 2016; Trubina 2018; Müller and Trubina 2020, this issue). In the same way, the dominant understanding of creative urbanism within established neoliberal theoretical frameworks (Florida 2005; Landry 2008) is too narrow to explain all the effects of global cultural initiatives for the cities of CEE.

This aspect is frequently sidelined in contemporary research. However, it is of major, even paramount importance. How do new cultural projects focusing on the revitalization of urban heritage represent the complex past of CEE cities? Are they transforming its experience and emotional resonance? Do they even leave any kind of space for this past? Or, maybe, is this past disappearing in the production of new discourses and symbolic meanings?

Here these questions are explored based on case studies showcasing the use of the 1920s–1960s modernist architectural heritage in CEE cities. This choice is determined by several factors. First, for Eastern European cities, the period of modernist transformations (especially during the interwar period) is pivotal: for many of them, it signified the emergence of a new urban structure, new urban spatial arrangements and a new symbolic status (Galusek 2018; Cohen 2012). Second, in Eastern Europe, the global modernist tools of urban policy were embedded within the very different ideological and social contexts of the interwar period, later overlaid by the new radical transformations of the socialist era. Under these conditions, modernist heritage has become a specific lens through which we can explore various interpretations of the Eastern European urban past in different countries and within different contexts. Finally, the sharp increase over the past decade of interest in re-thinking and the revitalization of modernist heritage has already turned into a global trend in its own right, becoming successfully embedded within the logic of cultural urbanism.

Since interpreting the past and its symbolic meanings have a special significance for this paper, it is important to distinguish between the countries for which modernist urban changes were first connected with the rise of the new nation-states in the interwar period and then continued in the socialist era after the Second World War (conditionally – “post-socialist” countries), and those countries where modernist urban experiments initially became an integral part of the Soviet reformation of society in the 1920 and 1930s (“post-Soviet” countries). For this reason, the second section of this paper analyzes cases from Poland and the Czech Republic, while the third one is devoted to the experience of post-Soviet countries, Russia and Ukraine.

“Revival” of modernist heritage as a trend in cultural urbanism

The concepts of creativity and cultural urbanism in their various versions created a new universal language used to describe a modern city and its new global philosophy: any city, regardless of its size, status or location, is a space potentially capable of producing new meanings and creative activities, and of developing a new environment for interaction (Florida 2005; Landry 2008; Edwards and Imrie 2015). However, the discourse of cultural urbanism followed different logics depending on the contexts in which it developed. Here two approaches have come to dominate the field. For the countries of the Global North, cultural urbanism has become a kind of new urbanist utopia that describes the “creative city of the future” (Ponzini and Rossi 2010; Goldberg-Miller 2017; Edwards and Imrie 2015). In the context of the Global South, however, it has come to be perceived as a tool of modernization, bridging the gap in socio-economic development (Grabski 2017; Guazon 2013; Jenkins 2015).

In this regard, the experience of CEE cities goes beyond this framework. Cultural urbanism practices acquired another layer of meaning within the context of post-socialist transformations. The main thrust of creative transformation of the urban environment was sought not so much in the development of new urban images of the “future”, or in ways to transform the “present”, but rather in the invocation of and reworking of the “past”. In this context, the very notion of urban space revitalization and “renewal” could be interpreted as a road to overcoming and getting rid of the “difficult”, “catastrophic” and “traumatic” past of CEE cities (Schlögel 2005). The symbolic component of the processes driving the “revitalization” of the urban heritage of socialism proved to be at least as important as the concrete urban planning solutions and tools used in working with the built environment – that is, for CEE nations “the re-interpretation of socialist past ... was often as important as political and economic transformations” (Czepczyński 2010, 19). The rhetoric of cultural urbanism fitted well into discourses about the “recodification”, “reinterpretation” and “revision” of the past in urban spaces – in a way, it provided such discussions with an additional conceptual foundation. Now it appeared that the search for new representations of historical symbols could be a part of a global-scale process and, thus, could acquire new significance and meaning.

In this context, cultural urbanism was less important as a concrete strategy and tool for transforming urban environments than as a discourse, as a new way to represent past heritage, which offered a new language to describe it. Unsurprisingly, in the majority of cases a large-scale revitalization of urban socialist heritage in CEE countries – and particularly in post-Soviet countries – remains mostly a declaration of intent and a potentiality, rather than being represented by actually existing projects. Nevertheless, debate about the prospects for the “cultural” adaptation of socialist districts continues unabated, and such debate remains an important component of public discussions in general

(see e.g. Shchukin 2016; Zodchestvo-2015 2015; ReNewTown 2019). An image of heritage that could be imbued with a “new life” was embedded in diverse urban development strategies, strategy documents, projects to redevelop urban spaces, academic and expert discussions, thus becoming a fixture of public discourse. In this respect, cultural urbanism practices in post-socialist states have gradually begun to foster a symbolic “discovery” and “rethinking” of districts and territories that were either neglected or viewed negatively from an ideological point of view. Multiple urban, cultural and art initiatives stimulated new ways to talk about urban heritage and highlighted the new contexts in which this heritage could be evaluated – thus stimulating interest from a wider audience. Urban heritage sites gradually became a venue for various artistic projects, social activities and educational events.

These processes are vividly illustrated by the growing interest in urban modernist heritage. Intensive efforts to study and “re-discover” this heritage have become a global trend in the 2000s (Beil, Schmitz, and Günter 2002; Quiring, Voigt, and Schmal 2011; Voss and Molitor 2018; Ritter, Katharina and Vienna Center of Architecture (ed.) 2013; Kulić, Parker, and Penick 2015; Craggs, Geoghegan, and Neate 2013, 2016). Urban districts that developed in modernist style – first in the interwar years and later also during the postwar period – have become the focus of attention of urban activists, urbanists, architects, artists and intellectuals in many countries all around the globe.

In CEE this work with modernist urban districts follows global trends. The gradual symbolic “re-discovery” of modernist architecture was perfectly aligned with the international experience. First, the modernist districts were recognized in the public consciousness as objects of high cultural value and world “heritage” (Haspel, Petzet, and Schmückle-Mollard 2008; Belyakova, Dushkina, and Mikeska 2006; Sołtysik and Hirsch 2015; ICOMOS Germany 2013); then they were transformed in an object of artistic and esthetic interest (Pare 2007; Ershov and Savitskii 2008; Jurewicz 2012; Prents 2014; Hoppe 2014; Craggs, Geoghegan, and Neate 2013, 2016); and, finally, they acquired the features of places attractive for tourists (Czepczyński 2008; Gdynia City Hall (ed.) 2016; Hlaváčková et al. 2012).

However, the key factor stimulating an increased interest in modernist heritage in the CEE context was not so much its esthetic value or unique architectural features – rather, it was an appeal to the past symbolized by this heritage. For Eastern European countries, modernist architecture represented the eras of social experimentation and fundamental cultural transformations that even now continue to determine the image and identity of post-socialist cities. Working with modernist heritage in this context means something more than a struggle to assign the “world heritage site” status to this or that building, or the artistic reclamation of disused neglected areas. All these projects always carried an overt or covert attempt to represent the past, its image, atmosphere and historical symbols. Modernist districts in CEE cities could serve as subjects of aestheticization and the creation of new artistic images (Bartetzky, Dietz, and

Haspel 2014; Ershov and Savitskiĭ 2008), of nostalgia and romantization (Czepczyński 2008; Young and Kaczmarek 2008), or they could facilitate a quest for new cultural meanings or historical reflection (Galusek 2018; Kladnik 2009) – but they were always invoked in some kind of dialogue with the past.

The images of the past in CEE cities became embedded within the new languages used to describe modernist districts, which, in turn, form a part of new urban narratives. Today it is particularly important to understand the logic and characteristics that determine the representation of these images, because the “modernist” past is different for different countries. For some countries (e.g. Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania), interwar modernism symbolizes independence and freedom – consequently, it is usually sharply juxtaposed with the period of postwar socialism (Szczerski 2010; Galusek 2018). On the other hand, for the majority of post-Soviet states (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus), this architecture heralds the beginning of the era of an imagined socialist utopia that in later decades came to be embodied in different forms and styles (Cohen 2011; Kosenkova 2009). It is therefore perfectly natural that contemporary projects working with modernist heritage in post-socialist countries translate different meanings and images of the Eastern European urban past into public discourse today.

This paper focuses on an analysis of strategy documents, presentations and concepts describing urban development projects, and the materials of multiple art projects unfolding within modernist urban spaces: exhibition catalogs; project announcements and concepts; local press and media materials reflecting key discussions on urban development and work with cultural heritage; as well as expert interviews with urban and social activists, members of proactive urban communities directly engaged in working with modernist heritage in post-socialist urban spaces (see Table 1 for more details on the research data).

The experts are leading specialists in the field for their regions and individuals actively involved in current public debates on modernist legacy. In this way, following the main research questions of the paper, the interviews were analyzed to reveal the unique aspects of dealing with modernist architecture in each locality (*what* experts were speaking about) and to trace specific ways in which this heritage is being represented (*how* experts are speaking about it). To sum up, the material analyzed here comprises all sources that help to elucidate the dominant modes governing the representation of Eastern European urban modernist heritage in contemporary public discourse determined by the “community of experts” (Lefebvre 1991).

Consequently, this paper analyzes urban space as a “social product” (following Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1996), which is constituted by the dominant modes of perception and representation in public discourse (Lefebvre 1991; Fraser 2015; Stanek 2011). To understand the meanings transmitted by contemporary projects which strive to culturally “reclaim” modernist urban districts in CEE

Table 1. The main research data.

Site of research	Data types	Language of the data sources	Date of the research
Gdynia (Poland)	historical archives of Gdynia City Museum; materials of exhibitions on local urban history (Gdynia City Museum, Mini Museum); local press materials; urban development projects and concepts (Agency for Development of Gdynia; Gdynia City Museum; Gdynia Tourist Information Center); expert interviews with local activists and specialists in local history (Jacek Friedrich, Jacek Debis, Weronika Szerle)	Polish, English	October 2018
Zlin (Czech Republic)	archive materials on the urban history of Zlin (František Bartoš Regional Library in Zlín; the specialized Library of the Regional Gallery of Fine Arts in Zlín; library of the "My Bata House Museum"); materials of exhibitions (Regional Gallery of Fine Arts in Zlín; "My Bata House Museum"); urban development plans and strategies, materials of public discussions on local urban development, revitalization projects etc. (Regional Gallery of Fine Arts in Zlín; Tourist-information center in Zlin); expert interviews with exhibition curators and local activists (Ivan Bergmann and Vít Jakubíček)	Czech, English	November 2018
Katowice (Poland)	archive materials and local press (Library of the Silesian Museum in Katowice); materials of exhibitions on Katowice modernist architecture and urban development (Silesian Museum in Katowice, International Cultural Center in Krakow); expert interviews with urban activists, scholars and exhibition curators in Katowice and Krakow (Alicja Gzowska, Anna Syska, Łukasz Galusek, Michał Wiśniewski)	Polish, English	January-February 2019
Uralmash district in Yekaterinburg (Russia)	archive materials on the history and development of the Uralmash district (Archive of the Museum of the History of Uralmash Plant, State Archive of the Sverdlovsk Region in Yekaterinburg, Belinsky Sverdlovsk Regional Scientific Library, the Shchusev State Museum of Architecture in Moscow); local press and media sources; materials of exhibitions and art projects held in cultural venues of Yekaterinburg (Yekaterinburg History Museum, Boris Yeltsin Presidential Center, venues of the Ural Industrial Biennial of Contemporary Art etc.)	Russian	November 2015- January 2016; January-June 2017; February – May 2018
Avtozavod district in Nizhny Novgorod (Russia)	materials of exhibitions and cultural projects on the history of the Avtozavod district (Arsenal/National center for contemporary arts in Nizhny Novgorod, Library of the Avtozavod district); local press materials; expert interviews with architects, local activists and tour guides (Aleksandr Dehtjar, Aleksandr Kuricyn, Marina Ignatushko, Victoria Azarova)	Russian	July 2018

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Site of research	Data types	Language of the data sources	Date of the research
Zaporizhia (Ukraine)	archive materials (State Archives of Zaporizhia Oblast, Zaporizhia Region Universal Scientific Library, Zaporizhia Regional Museum); materials of exhibitions and art projects (Gallery of Modern Art “Barannik”, Zaporizhia Regional Museum); local press and media sources; expert interviews with local officials, historians, activists, artists (Pavlo Kravchuk, Valery Stoychev, Igor Pavelko, Natalia Lobach, Pyotr Boyko, Alexey Shteinle, Volodymyr Linikov)	Ukrainian, Russian	July-August 2017

countries, this paper uses narrative analysis to elucidate the dominant ways in which these areas are represented in public discourse, as well as their characteristics and the manner of their reproduction (Tamboukou 2008; Livholts and Tamboukou 2015; Hastings 1999; Mele 2000).

The cases selected, on the one hand, represent the most large-scale and iconic modernist urban planning experiments realized in the countries of Eastern Europe in the interwar period. On the other hand, all of them are notable examples of intensive cultural and public activity around modernist heritage in the region. Thus, the Polish cities of Gdynia and Katowice and the Czech city Zlín represent the practices of working with modernist urban sites in CEE. The post-Soviet experience of dealing with modernist urban areas is presented by three cases of former “socialist cities” (sotsgorods): the Uralmash district (Yekaterinburg, Russia), the Avtozavod district (Nizhny Novgorod, Russia) and Zaporizhia (Ukraine).

Modernist urban heritage as “a window to the past” in Central and Eastern Europe

The Polish city of Gdynia may be considered one of the most well-known examples of extensive working with modernist heritage in CEE. In the early 1920s, the government of the Second Polish Republic decided to transform a small fishing community in the northern part of the country into a large seaport symbolizing the strength and prosperity of the new independent nation (Gdynia 1934; Rummel 1934). The city was built in a pointedly modern functional style. Its unified modernist architecture survived and has become a major European heritage site preserving the modernist architecture of the interwar period. Since the latter half of the 2000s, the city authorities began to systematically preserve, “revitalize” and rethink the role of modernist heritage. Gdynia’s modernist architecture is positioned as a part of “world heritage”, “unique on a global scale” (Gdynia 2017, 26), while the strategy employed in working with this architecture fully aligns with global trends. Gdynia’s modernist heritage is included in various lists of historical heritage sites. In 2015 the center of the city was assigned the status of “Poland’s Historical Monument” (Śródmieście Gdyni Pomnikiem Historii 2015) and modernist architecture is being gradually transformed into the city’s main brand (Gdynia City Hall (ed.) 2016; Widuto 2015), a process accompanied by multiple public discussions, educational programs and research conferences (see e.g. Sołtysik and Hirsch 2015).

Behind the rhetoric of presentations and tourist booklets, there is an attempt to represent modernist Gdynia as an “open”, “sunny”, “happy” and “contemporary” city (Gdynia City Hall (ed.) 2016; Gdyniński szlak modernizmu 2015; Dabrowska 2017). Here the description of architecture seems to be deliberately “ahistorical” – there is nothing but esthetics, images, style, “geometry and rhythm” and a focus

on the “modernist world heritage” (Widuto 2015). Any reference to a specific historical era, if present, is reduced to the background or a general historical note. Such a representation almost perfectly embodies cultural urbanism’s main message: urban districts are “cleansed” of the past and transformed into objects of new cultural interest, thus acquiring a “new life”. An image of Gdynia as a unique Polish city “unburdened by the past” (Dabrowska 2017, 10) fits ideally into this paradigm.

However, the main narrative of the “revived” Gdynia’s modernist heritage that determined this architecture’s perception and public image started to develop beyond the “tourist” rhetoric. This narrative was built on entirely different foundations and not only openly invoked the modernist district’s past but essentially turned work with the past into a key form of its representation.

At the beginning of 2017, Gdynia City Museum – a key contemporary cultural institution in the city – opened a new permanent exhibition. This became a landmark event for Gdynia, since, according to the government’s idea, this exhibition was supposed to consolidate Gdynia’s new image in the minds of urban residents and visitors to the city. According to the Mayor, it was meant to become “an extremely important aspect of Gdynia’s identity” (Friedrich and Śliwa 2017, 7). Gdynia’s modernist origins have become one of the exhibition’s core narratives, while the modernist architecture has been embedded in its conceptual historical fabric. The images of modernist buildings and districts have been accompanied by multiple quotations from eyewitnesses to the construction, contemporaries, photos from family albums and extracts from personal letters. Here the architecture becomes not so much a way to showcase the new city’s image and esthetics but a way to talk about its residents, their personal stories and, most importantly, about the historical era. Jacek Friedrich, director of Gdynia City Museum and one of the authors of its permanent exhibition, emphasized:

For us, at least in the Museum ... but I think it is also in the City of Gdynia in general it is very important to make modern architecture and this architectural tradition of the town something that is a part of our consciousness, a part of Gdynia identity. And it works ... This is very important from the point of local identity ... This link with a family history, with personal histories, this consciousness that this was built by our hands or by our fathers and grandfathers. This is so important. That is for sure. And this is one of the most important things in Gdynia (Expert interview with Jacek Friedrich held on 25 October 2018 in Gdynia)

Such an approach to the exhibition perfectly illustrated the main characteristics of the dominant narrative of Poland and other CEE countries: it describes working with modernist heritage by appealing to the historical past and to the image of the interwar era. Gdynia’s distinctive feature is that, in its local context, this connection with the interwar past acquired the “emotional, personal and family character” (Ibid), since many residents trace their origins to the

founding of the city. This is reflected, for example, in a number of cultural projects, in which modernist architecture serves as a “window into the past” and provides an opportunity to experience direct connection with this era through the encounters with personal histories and family archives. One of these projects is “Mini Museum” located in one of the most famous Gdynia’s modernist buildings which aims to reproduce the daily life of its inhabitants starting from the 1930s through the collection of historical artifacts (see Mini Museum 2017). However, in the majority of cases, modernist heritage represents the interwar period as a bygone romantic era with a special symbolic significance, juxtaposing it with both previous and subsequent historical experience.

Overtly or covertly, working with modernist architecture in the CEE context has been transformed into a way to talk about the past and a new tool for transmitting the images of this past in public space. These images, in different variations, became embedded in official rhetoric, as well as in esthetic discourse and in intellectual discussions. Thus, almost every presentation, document or speech of officials that dealt with the preservation or revitalization of Gdynia’s modernist districts emphasized their connection with the historical past. In the Introduction to the tourist guide to modernism, the city Mayor talked about the unique development of the city during the interwar years “dramatically interrupted by the outbreak of World War II” (Widuto 2015, 2). And in the President of Poland’s official declaration assigning Gdynia’s center the status of national historical monument, it was specifically noted that the city center is “a remarkable accomplishment of Polish modernism and, due to its special role in the development of our motherland and its contribution to forming the Polish identity after she regained her independence, the center is regarded as a symbol of the Second Polish Republic (II Rzeczpospolita)” (cited from Gdynia City Hall (ed.) 2016, 5).

In art projects focusing on modernist Gdynia, the interwar era becomes somewhat detached and romanticized. Here modernist architecture helps to recreate an image and an atmosphere of the interwar years as a distinctive period in the development of Polish society. A characteristic example is a book titled “Mister Modern. A Gaudy/Colourful/Vibrant Life in White Gdynia” (Solarz 2017) published as a result of an educational project “Travel into the Interior of the House” carried out by Gdynia City Museum. The goal of the project was to involve children in creative activities and introduce them to modernist architecture and urban cultural heritage (Podróż do wnętrza domu [Journey to the interior of the house] 2017). In the book, the readers experience Gdynia through the eyes of the main character, Mister Modern, as a world of modernity incarnate, full of technical and social achievements – an effect made particularly vivid by the bright illustrations of bold geometric modernist buildings. The impact of the book is described very well in one of the reviews: “I love when books transfer me in time and show a reality that no longer exists. It was wonderful to travel to

1930s Gdynia with Mister Modern. And Mister Modern is not just any guy. Our hero is a person of the world, well off and completely modern” (Kołodziej 2017).

Similar tendencies can be observed in another landmark modernist European city – Zlín in Czech Republic. During the late 1920s – early 1930s, this small provincial town became one of the twentieth century’s boldest social and urban experiments in developing an ideal industrial urban space, envisioned by the founder of the famous “Bata” shoe factory, Tomáš Bata (Pavitt 1994; Szczerski 2010; Ševeček and Jemelka 2013). As a result of this experiment, Zlín was transformed into a company town that gradually became branded as one of the major “modernist utopias” (Bittner 2008; Klingan 2009). In the late 1990s, faced with the decline in industrial production, the regional authorities developed a strategy for the gradual integration of former industrial areas into the urban state and for reclaiming factory buildings as administrative, office, educational and cultural centers (Všetečka 2013; Zhuravlyova 2016). Zlín became a classic example of the revitalization of industrial areas and an object of the “creative transformation” rhetoric. The renaissance of the decayed industrial center turned into something like a new brand image for the city (Všetečka 2013).

However, for Zlín, working with modernist industrial districts meant not only the potential for finding new functional uses for ex-industrial areas, but also the restoration of symbols of the city’s identity connected with the interwar period and the “era of Tomáš Bata”. The process of renovating factory areas was accompanied by various educational and research projects that reconstructed an image of the interwar era and highlighted its importance in the city’s development. In these spaces, modernist architecture became not just an impressive visual image – differing social, cultural and historical meanings were also projected into these areas. This was exemplified by a landmark exhibition “The Bata phenomenon. Zlín architecture 1910–1960” (Horňáková 2009). “This was an exhibition not only about architecture. This was the first time when we saw the entire wide context of what happened, the social history. This was an exhibition about culture, about lifestyle, about us”, said Ivan Bergmann, curator of the Regional Gallery of Fine Arts in Zlín (Expert interview with Ivan Bergmann held on 27 November 2018 in Zlín).

As in the case with Gdynia, modernist architecture represented Zlín’s interwar past as an “era of hopes and discoveries”, a certain “golden age” in the city’s and the nation’s development.

The complete, holistic transformation of almost everything, beginning with people’s minds, their education, the discovery of their own previously unsuspected capabilities and skills, enthusiasm for a shared task, pride in belonging to the company and the town of Zlín, including a healthy sense of patriotism, the overcoming of physical and mental limitations – all of this is “The Bata Phenomenon”. Even the long decades of the communist regime – including its use of the harshest methods, the forced renaming of Zlín to Gotvaldov, the nationalization and appropriation of the factory and private property – did not fundamentally change the firmly rooted Bata legacy in those people who had experienced “The Bata Phenomenon” directly” (Horňáková 2009, 11)

With these words Zlín's Mayor Irena Ondrová greeted the audience of the exhibition about Zlín architecture. The Mayor's observations in many ways find continuation in the opinion expressed by Milan Knížák, director of the Prague National Gallery:

Since most of my own life took place during communism, I know very well how quickly the enthusiasm for building socialism subsided and how lethargy, resistance and hatred towards it grew. To this day I wonder how it was possible that in the world of Bata these phenomena did not appear at all, or appeared only exceptionally. What was the magical "something" he had that managed to captivate the masses? (Ibid, 13)

While in official rhetoric "the Bata age" has been wittingly juxtaposed with the socialist era, in most art projects it is depicted as if lost in time, with only a few concrete historical features explicit. "My Bata House" is a project reconstructing the standard housing for Bata factory workers. It was launched several years ago by the researcher Jitka Ressová with the goal of recreating the historical atmosphere and everyday conditions of these buildings, as well as to explore ways to preserve them (Ressová 2012; My Bata House 2012). An exhibition inside the "My Bata House" museum is introduced by a short animated film. The main character is a young man who finds a job and starts building his career at the factory of the growing modern city (Bahulová 2017). His life unfolds against the backdrop of rising buildings, comfortable dwellings and emerging new leisure activities. On the one hand, some details used in the film – the photographs and architectural designs – recognizably point to a concrete place and era. On the other hand, the cinematic reality seems to exist beyond time, representing an image of a budding new city and a new life filled with light and hopes for the future. This form of representation produces a peculiar emotional resonance, moving us to envision an entire life and a distinctive world encapsulated by the stereotypical modernist "boxes" of workers' districts – a world "unburdened" by the past, yet still associated with a very recognizable period in regional history.

However, this image of the past remains the main way to represent the "revitalized" modernist districts in the CEE context even when a corresponding historical era, instead of being subjected to romantization, becomes the focus of rejection and "suppression". This mostly concerns the districts built during the postwar socialist period. The experience of the past decade in CEE of re-codifying and "liberating" urban spaces from the symbols of the socialist past demonstrates that the act of "cleansing" urban landscapes from the past (Czepczyński 2008) does not eliminate this past from the city's symbolic representations, but rather makes it stand out by omission. Such a rejected and "repressed" past remains a paramount element of urban identity stimulating the new languages of description, discourses and approaches to historical symbols and narratives.

Thus, for instance, the socialist urban heritage of Katowice, another center of Polish modernist architecture, becomes embedded in a new local narrative. As

a major center in industrial Silesia, Katowice first became a place of active urban development during the interwar period that symbolized the establishment of the new Polish authority in the city (Odorowski 2013; Szczerski 2014; Syska and Tomasz 2015). The second stage of dynamic development happened during the socialist years, when the authorities of the Polish People's Republic tried to transform Katowice in something like an exemplary Polish industrial city (see e.g. Crowley 2009; Blokowice 2015). Today Katowice presents one of the most successful CEE examples of the revitalization of industrial heritage, and the regional authorities rely extensively on the rhetoric of industrialism in developing the city's new image (Sobala-Gwosdz and Gwosdz 2017; Lamparska 2013). The modernist architectural heritage of the socialist era acquires a new tone and meaning in this context. It is no longer repressed, and not only does it not excise this period in history but, on the contrary, presents it as an important symbolic stage in the development of the city and the region. Katowice is represented as a city in which industrialism and modernism permeate its entire history regardless of political regimes, becoming essentially a part of its identity. This can be seen, for instance, in various exhibitions using new ways to represent the local history of the city (see e.g. permanent exhibition at the Silesian Museum (Permanent Exhibition 2017)), or in tourist initiatives aiming to use modernist architecture as a new brand of the city (Szlak Moderny [Route of Modernism] 2017). As a result, ideological component of the socialist modernist architecture becomes secondary, since it is perceived as only one of the manifestations of the city's enduring logic of development.

This is how Anna Syska, urban historian and Katowice researcher, interprets the new narrative:

One can say that modernism and modernity determine Katowice's identity. Not as a style, but as a way of thinking. This can be seen already in the worker's settlements of early 19th century, which were social experiments, not just experiments in urban planning. The same thing happens after the First World War, when modernism becomes an official government program. Even after the Second World War, socialist realism here develops differently, it is not the same as in Warsaw or in Moscow, but a local version. You can find in it the elements of the interwar period. And after 1956, we again see the active experiments in design (Expert interview with Anna Syska held on 28 January 2019 in Katowice)

Any work with modernist architecture in CEE – be it revitalization, reconstruction or regular educational activity aimed at preserving the heritage – has been almost always accompanied by the use of symbols of the past, or an attempt to embed this architecture into local or national historical narratives. In essence, the very process of working with modernist heritage becomes one of the tools for constructing such narratives. It highlights new images, names and symbols; builds new historical connections; discovers new public perceptions and reactions toward historical events. That is, it essentially becomes a way to search for an identity. A dialogue with the past in this situation becomes inevitable. This is

particularly important for the former socialist states that have become a part of Europe.

Our part of Europe was looking for this new kind of identity that could be based on the historical identity, in order to show ourselves and to others in Europe that we are not the poor cousin in the European family, that we have a history, that we have this kind of tradition, identity and things like that. That is why, this is just my theory, all those historical forms became so popular in Poland and in other countries

This is how Jacek Friedrich explains the growing interest in modernist heritage happening in recent years (Expert interview with Jacek Friedrich held on 25 October 2018 in Gdynia). It is very telling that in contemporary public representations, art projects and intellectual discussions, modernist architecture in CEE countries is increasingly often placed in the context of deliberations on independence, freedom, modernization and cultural identity (Galusek 2018; Kohlrausch 2019; Szczerski 2015). In this regard, it is particularly important to understand the differences in public perception and representation of modernist architecture in the countries where the development of this architecture was linked to the most radical social and cultural experimentation of Soviet authorities.

Working with Utopia: symbolic revival of “socialist cities” (*sotsgorods*)

The projects striving to revitalize and renovate the interwar modernist districts in post-Soviet republics remain rare. However, the past decade has produced such vigorous debates on ways of working with Soviet urban architectural heritage from the 1920s–1930s that such projects have not only become a part of public rhetoric but contributed to the emergence of a completely new narrative about Soviet interwar architecture and the Soviet city in general (Ilchenko 2018; Ilczenko 2016). The growing interest in Soviet avant-garde and constructivist architecture coincided with the global fascination with modernist heritage and generally followed global trends (Pare 2007; ICOMOS Germany 2013; Hatherley 2016). However, there was a major difference – the fact that the interwar architecture in the post-Soviet context was from the very beginning seen not so much as a part of world heritage and an example of unique style, but rather as an artifact of “the Soviet”. Therefore, re-discovery of this architecture led to the re-discovery not only of modernist esthetics and cultural values but, first and foremost, of the Soviet era itself. As a result, any work with and rethinking of Soviet urban heritage immediately required working with the past. Particularly interesting in this respect is an example of the “socialist cities” (*sotsgorods*) – experimental territories of mass urban development built in the 1920s–1930s near large-scale industrial plants, which became residential districts of major cities after the collapse of the Soviet system (Miliutin 1930;

O socialisticheskikh gorodakh 1934; Kotkin 1997; Sozgorod 2008; Flierl 2012; Meerovich et al. 2011; Konyshева and Meerovich 2012).

In 2006, the National Center for Contemporary Art in Russia initiated a project titled “Walks for Art”¹ whose mission was described as the “artistic reclamation of everyday life and work during the Soviet experience” focusing on the 1920s–1930s constructivist districts of several cities (Interaktivnyj hudozhestvenno-obrazovatel’nyj proekt «Progulki za iskusstvom» 2006). One such site was Uralmash district – a former “socialist city” built in record time during the industrialization era around the largest heavy machinery building plant of the USSR in the city of Sverdlovsk (the present-day Ekaterinburg) (Makarov 1958; Unpelev 1960; Starikov et al. 1998; Bauhaus na Urale 2010; Ilchenko 2016a, 2016b). Its yards and quiet streets were filled with artists, art historians and curators – all of them were seeking to find new meanings and images in the empty space of the “vanished Soviet civilization”. This was reflected directly in the project goal: “to discover an artistic tradition within the Soviet experience” (Ershov and Savitskiĭ 2008). The Uralmash factory appeared to the project’s participants as “fragments, ruins, remnants of the once hyper-intensive life; of the Soviet civilization that vanished into the past”; these ruins still preserve a “superhuman drive, power, takeoff into the future that never came” (Ibid, 75). And the “socialist city” itself became a “ruin, desolate outskirts, backwater”; a place where the Soviet past is experienced in a different way, as something “that harbors the energy of the future” (Ibid, 77).

The rhetoric used, the tone of the discourse about the “socialist city”, and the very fact that it involved members of an artistic milieu, were in this case highly indicative in regards to the trajectory that the new forms of representing Soviet architectural heritage acquired in public discourse. Following the rise of public interest in the avant-garde, the 1920s–1930s architectural ensembles gradually became a venue for projects focusing not so much on their stylistic, esthetic or architectural features, but on the era that they symbolize. In the geometrical shapes and ascetic lines of dilapidated facades, artists, designers, historians and journalists strove to see the contours of the past, to experience its spirit and atmosphere. Avant-garde buildings became windows into the past, capturing a feeling of the zeitgeist of that era when the “new world” was under construction. It does not really matter that this world had ultimately never materialized, and that this era had ended suddenly, after barely beginning. On the contrary, this exuded a particular kind of charm: to talk about the future that never came. This gradually created a discourse of “unrealized utopia” that offered a new way of talking about the Soviet interwar architecture.

The “utopian” discourse shifted perspectives on modernist districts in the post-Soviet context. They became attractive because of their signaling of a certain era – through symbols and marks of time. Therefore, the object of study became simultaneously the source of inspiration. Soviet urban districts

became not only the spaces of “archaeological” research, but also spaces of fantasy and imaginative leaps accompanied by overtones of sentimentality.

A good example here is another art project, “Communal Avant-Garde”² (Belova and Savitskaia 2011). Its research objects included Uralmash, as well as another landmark Soviet *sotsgorod* – the Avtozavod district in Nizhny Novgorod built in the early 1930s near the new Soviet giant industrial project, Gorky Automobile Plant (GAZ) (Austin 2004; DeHaan 2013; Belova and Savitskaia 2011, 7–32).

Within the project, both *sotsgorods* were also turned into spaces for walks, creative explorations and contemplations. However, its organizers went even further in their artistic and emotional impulses. In their opening remarks, the curators explained the concept of the exhibition part of the project:

The exposition is deliberately stripped of the descriptions, addresses and names of concrete buildings that were used as installation prototypes. The “new city”, built by the artists, lives on providing the viewers with an opportunity to figure out for themselves the boundary between avant-garde and totalitarian style, reality and phantom, constructional innovation and utopia (Belova and Savitskaia 2011, 5)

In the Preface to the guidebook to Uralmash its authors emphasized:

Today Uralmash is a fascinating ruin where the traces of the real and the utopian are difficult to discern. This article strives to help you locate the main objects of the *sotsgorod* [...] but you, dear reader, will have to follow one basic rule: add the word ‘probably’ to every one of our recommendations. For example, on the righthand side you will [probably!] see this, or you would [probably!] like to turn into that alley. Probably, you are going to explore the space that doesn’t exist, but whose shadows and echoes you will probably manage to find (Ibid, 35).

Here the “socialist city” was envisioned not only as a space to be seen but a space to be created, a place constructed through imagination. “The remnants of Soviet civilization”, taking the form of decrepit buildings, become less the objects of archeological study than the cause for meditating on the “future that never came”. Each building is seen as a sign and a symbol. Therefore, the description of “ruins and remnants” revealed rather a secret pleasure provided by such imagery than an anxious desire for preservation or an attempt to determine the building’s uniqueness.

Similar forms of representation can be found in contemporary public rhetoric surrounding the “socialist city” of Zaporizhia in Ukraine – one of the most high-profile urban developments in the 1920s–1930s USSR launched during the construction of the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station, the largest hydroelectric power plant in the country (Haustov 1930; Maloz’omov 1933; Orlov and Lavrov 1938; Vasilevskii and Smirnova 1958). About a decade ago, the district of the 6th settlement – the only completed part of the gigantic unfinished interwar urban project to create a “Greater Zaporizhia” – gradually began to attract the interest of the active city community. Thanks to discussions and public projects created by artists,

researchers, urbanists and architects, the district acquired a new symbolic meaning, becoming firmly associated in public space with such images as the “museum of utopia” and the “lost city of the future” (Zateriannyi gorod budushchego 2011; Bol’shoe Zaporozh’e 2011; Mordovskii 2011).

“*Sotsgorod* is a special emotional component, it is a thing that magically turns your head, which completely defies explanations. It is a special energy that was built into the space, and eighty years later you can feel it all”. This is how Natalia Lobach, art manager and curator of the “Barannik” gallery, who initiated and actively participated in many artistic and educational projects for the preservation of Zaporizhia’s constructivist urban heritage, describes her experience of the *sotsgorod*’s space (Expert interview with Natalia Lobach held on 30 July 2017 Zaporizhia).

This emotional intensity and artistic experimentation with images highlight an important characteristic of how the *sotsgorods*’ past is represented. On the one hand, this past is shown as an actual historical period, tangible and directly experienced through concrete artifacts, buildings and structures.

Watching the Avtozavod district from year to year, I see that it makes sense to bring people there, showing them this island with remnants of the good socialism. With the few good things that existed and were saved. All of this creates a certain atmosphere

This is how Victoria Azarova, organizer of tours around the Avtozavod *sotsgorod* in Nizhny Novgorod, expresses her experience of dealing with the Soviet urban area (Expert interview with Victoria Azarova held on 1 July 2018 in Nizhny Novgorod).

On the other hand, the same artifacts and the special atmosphere of the experimental districts construct an image of the interwar era as a remote time of hopes and expectations, which, though possessing concrete historical features, seems to remain suspended outside time. “Sometimes it seems that the *sotsgorod* is this thing in itself. That this utopian city was built not in the Soviet Union. Not during the hunger of 1932–1933. But when it was built – impossible to say”, is how researcher and urbanist Pyotr Boyko describes his impressions of working in the 6th settlement district in Zaporizhia (Expert interview with Pyotr Boyko held on 30 July 2017 in Zaporizhia).

At the first glance, this trait shows similarities between the representations of the *sotsgorods* and the images surrounding the interwar years in Eastern Europe, with their idealization and romanization of the era right after independence. However, there is a key difference here: in the post-Soviet context, this experience of the past is much more intense, since it is always tinged with dramatic tension. This dramatic tension accompanies not only the nostalgic feeling of times gone by, but also an experience of a constructed and romantic image of the era depicted not only as a “golden age” or a “time of hope”, but also as an era that “did not happen”, “might have been” and “never came to be”. This multilayered interaction with the past, perfectly captured by the art projects, is exactly what makes an image of “socialist cities” so attractive to the wider

audience: it simultaneously produces an experience of historical immersion, provokes nostalgia and turns these districts into an imaginary space.

Thanks to the fact that the “utopian” interpretation of the interwar Soviet districts has become entrenched in public rhetoric, this interpretation has helped a wider audience to see and recognize these spaces on the contemporary city map. The “utopian” discourse has imbued these localities with new meanings, established their symbolic borders and, to all intents and purposes, led to their re-discovery in public consciousness. Gradually, the “socialist cities” have been included in tourist itineraries and guidebooks, become subjects of public discussions on the future of urban architectural heritage, began to be noted in urban planning and attracted the attention of developers (Asriiān 2014; Mordovskii 2011; Interview with Vera Belous 2016; Interview with Sergei Kamenskii 2017; Zaporizhzhia City Council 2018). A new approach to these districts’ past helped to reintroduce them into the symbolic space of the city not only as “monuments” and “heritage objects” but as territories with the potential for cultural and social development. Although in the majority of cases such strategies remain declarations of intent, the very fact that these districts acquired this new symbolic identification is very important to the development of the emerging post-Soviet urban identity.

It is also important that, unlike in CEE countries, the “revitalization” of interwar modernist architecture in the former Soviet countries is hardly ever reflected in official rhetoric. As a result, they are free from any politization. The case of Zaporizhia is very indicative in this respect. The 2014 Ukrainian revolution resulted in a drastic shift in official rhetoric surrounding the Soviet past. This past became a space of denial – a fact that, among other consequences, led to the introduction of decommunization policy. In Zaporizhia, the statue of Lenin was removed from the *sotsgorod’s* center, the “Soviet” streets and squares were renamed, and debates erupted on whether certain symbols of the Soviet era should be preserved or removed from public space (see e.g. V Zaporozh’e dekomunizirovali bolee 100 ulits [More than 100 streets are decommunized in Zaporizhia] 2016; Proshchanie s èpokhoi 2017).

Despite all this, the new political situation not only did not result in the de-historization of the *sotsgorod’s* space, but, on the contrary, stimulated new symbolic approaches to the past and new emerging historical discourses about the district. At the same time, the “Soviet” itself has never vanished – it was simply marked differently. It became successfully embedded in the theme of industrialism and into local history. For example, Valery Stoychev, local historian and one of the active participants and initiators of the research project on Zaporizhia history, noted:

In the project we don’t separate the “Soviet” from the “non-Soviet”. We are showing the history of our city ... What happened in 2014–2015 was a radical breakup of the post-Soviet space. But the issue of Homo Sovieticus is very noticeable in Zaporizhia.

They are worker's families. This is a city of factories and plants. There are grandparents who were plant workers, already in the third or fifth generation ... There are no such notions as "Soviet" or "non-Soviet" here. This is simply our life (Expert interview with Valery Stoychev held on 29 July 2017 in Zaporizhia)

Characteristically, even the renaming of the *sotsgorod's* streets in 2015 did not succeed in driving the "Soviet" out of the local toponymy – again, this renaming simply facilitated its re-marking. Thus, the names of the most notorious Soviet figures and landmark Soviet events were replaced by the names of Soviet architects, scientists and public figures who participated in the construction of both the "socialist city" and the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station but were not associated with any overt political or ideological activity. These measures succeeded only in emphasizing and strengthening the important role played by the local narrative of Soviet history in the development of the city image. As local historian Igor Pavelko says:

In our city, thanks to decommunization, we managed to embed the Soviet history more correctly. For example, we now have Vegman street {an architect – M.I.}, Preobrazhensky street {an engineer – M.I.}, Yelansky square {a public figure – M.I.}. They are all Soviet people who contributed greatly to the history of our city (Expert interview with Igor Pavelko held on 29 July 2017 in Zaporizhia)

Here the case of Zaporizhia becomes a metaphor for post-Soviet cities in general, clearly demonstrating that, regardless of the changing political or social context, rhetoric and ideology, the past, with its images and multiple historical narratives, remains the main form in which Soviet urban architectural heritage is represented today.

Conclusion

Both for CEE countries and for the former Soviet republics, revitalization and exploration of modernist architecture are largely a new trend, with its general outlines barely becoming discernible over the past decade. In this sense, cultural urban initiatives that took root in CEE seem to follow the general global logic: their declared goals, way of promotion, economic justifications and public expectations tend to be mostly similar to the experience of any other region in the world.

However, if we go deeper into each concrete case, it becomes obvious that almost everywhere in the CEE countries this global trend acquired special local meaning and interpretation. Being targeted at transforming current urban conditions and inspired by a vision of the future, cultural urbanism in CEE is nevertheless becoming especially focused on the past, its images, messages and symbolic conflicts. This does not mean that the past appears to be a constraint for creative and cultural change. It means that the questions of what is being

transformed and why become more significant in the CEE context than the final result of the transformation itself.

In fact, the discourse of the “past” has a double function for the development of cultural urban initiatives in the CEE context. On the one hand, it addresses one of the most acute challenges faced by the region in rethinking its history and ideological symbols. On the other hand, intensive public discussions on sensitive historical issues, to a certain extent, make up for the lack of real practical steps in revitalizing and transforming challenged urban areas. Against the backdrop of uncertainty in urban development and economic difficulties, such debates can create a feeling of progress in the changing social dynamics of CEE, which by itself is significant. Huge urban areas and districts, which did not receive much public attention in recent decades, started to be thought of differently. Of course, in each case, these processes have their own peculiarities, but they do share a general trend and this can be clearly seen in the example of modernist heritage.

Work with modernist urban areas in CEE has become less a tool for functional “revival” of industrial districts than a way to symbolically “re-discover” them within urban space. Modernist urban localities have become simultaneously an important historical symbol and a successful projection of cultural, social and political meanings. They became a way to re-imagine the history of the CEE cities in general. Therefore, debates concerning their revitalization have turned, directly or indirectly, into discussions about the past and their symbolic meaning (see [Table 2](#) summarizes case studies).

In the CEE context, this appeal to the past appears to be something more than a temporary attempt to overcome “complex recent history” in changing social conditions (Czepczyński 2010). In a sense, re-thinking the past turns into continuous process, a sort of a “constituent element” of the CEE urban identity. If the “past” more often becomes a part of the “present” or, in the words of Robinson, a part of “now” (Robinson 2016, 648), then the “work with the past” is gradually evolving into a certain mode of existence for the cities of CEE. Characteristically, the discussions about symbolic status and history of the modernist urban districts have become one of the key conditions and foundations for their successful revitalization, both in CEE and across the post-Soviet space. In a way, their *symbolic* adaptation was more important than the *functional* one. These districts required a special approach, special public representation and special languages of description. This fact not only points again to the historical complexity and multi-layered character of CEE cities, but, primarily, highlights the importance of the past to their present condition: to concrete urban practices, solutions and strategies, as well as to the modes of representation and development of identity.

Certainly, this continuous presence of the past does not in any way imply the lack of “future-oriented” thinking on the cities in CEE, just as it does not call into

Table 2. Modernist urban areas in the cities of Central and Eastern Europe: new narratives and prospects for revitalization.

Modernist urban area	New narrative and way of representation in public discourse	Interpreted past and historical symbols	Revitalization experience and implemented projects
Gdynia (Poland)	modernist architecture as a new city's brand (Gdynia as "the pearl of modernism" and unique architectural site in a global scale, one of the youngest cities in Poland with a downtown to be recognized as a National Historic Monument);	Gdynia city center as a symbol of the Second Polish Republic and the construction of a Polish identity in the interwar years	renovation of the main historical modernist landmarks, restoration of the original facades and architectural details; preservation and regeneration of the modernist buildings became a part of urban development strategies
Zlin (Czech Republic)	Zlin as an exemplary modernist industrial city and realized urban planning utopia which expresses the main features of the European industrial history and architectural thought.	Zlin as a monument of the Tomáš Bata era which symbolizes "golden age" in the city's development; local version of romantization of the interwar period as an "era of hopes and discoveries"	one of the most successful Eastern European examples to transform decaying industrial territories into the new administrative and cultural center; systemic work of revitalizing city's modernist heritage; grassroots initiatives to regenerate the objects of the modernist mass housing
Katowice (Poland)	representation of modernism and industriality as a cornerstone of Katowice's identity, shaping new narrative of local history	interwar years as the city's heyday in the period of the new Polish authority establishment; period of socialism as a time for a new rise of modernist urban planning experiments; city's development in the late 19th–early 20th century as a period laying the ground for further modernist transformations	successful experience of revitalizing the objects of industrial heritage; renovation of the interwar and postwar landmark modernist buildings; rethinking the role of modernist heritage in the urban development strategies
Uralmash district in Yekaterinburg (Russia)	"Utopian" discourse as a main way of thinking about Soviet modernist areas; nostalgic and sentimental view on the Uralmash as an architectural and cultural monument of the bygone Soviet era	1928–1932 as a period of industrialization, the first five-year plan and era of "hopes and expectations"; 1930–1950s, the rise of "socialist cities"; scarcely reflected in official rhetoric and almost free from politicization	revitalization measures mostly remain a declaration of intentions and a dead letter, although they are gradually penetrating the urban strategies and official programming documents; the loss of a number of landmark architectural monuments
Avtozavod district in Nizhny Novgorod (Russia)	"Utopian" discourse, representation of the district as a "museum of the Soviet era"	1930–1950s as a period, symbolizing the establishment of the Soviet society and the rise of "socialist cities"; scarcely reflected in official rhetoric	a partial restoration of selected modernist buildings; a lack of systemic work with urban heritage; revitalization strategies remain to be declaratory

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Modernist urban area	New narrative and way of representation in public discourse	Interpreted past and historical symbols	Revitalization experience and implemented projects
Zaporizhia (Ukraine)	“Utopian” discourse based on the local interpretations of the Soviet industrial history	1930–1950s as a period of the city’s industrial heyday and urban planning experiments	public activity to obtain the status of architectural monument and world heritage site; the cases of building restoration are isolated; revitalization measures mostly remain to be a declaration

question their openness to any global cultural and creative trends. But it makes the course of all these processes distinct from the accepted “neoliberal” norm and, thus, requires thinking about them in alternative ways, going beyond the frameworks of either the Global North or Global South. In this sense, here we have another argument regarding the importance of deeper attention to the local conditions of current urban development within the contemporary global context.

Notes

1. The project was organized in September 2006 by PRO ARTE Institute and Ekaterinburg Branch of the National Center for Contemporary Art.
2. The project “Communal Avant-Garde” (*Kommunal'nyi avangard*) was organized by Volga and Ural Branches of the National Center for Contemporary Art. The project took the form of an exhibition at the 1st Ural Biennial of Contemporary Art in Ekaterinburg (September 10–30, 2010) and in Nizhny Novgorod’s *Arsenal* (9 November 2011–10 January 2012). A catalog/guide book was also produced (Belova and Savitskaia 2011).

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ORCID

Mikhail Ilchenko  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5736-8821>

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