

# Introduction

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Eastern Europe has recently received much attention from scholars irrespective of diverse focus and specialization, and the special section of this distinguished journal is yet another proof that the region remains an extraordinarily interesting place for research and analysis. Scholarly interests have, however, often been related to the emergence, establishment and eventual demise of state socialism in this heterogeneous place, the horrors of World War II and the profound transformations that swept through its many old-new countries during recent decades. The predominance of political, social and intellectual history, as well as sociology and political science, and scholarly interpretations of the condition of modernity in Eastern Europe come therefore as little surprise. This methodological apparatus at hand, significant aspects of the region's development during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have sometimes been overlooked, while others appeared teleological. Within the traditions of both Western and Eastern European academia, the region has until recently been perceived as having followed a very distinct, special path to modernity characterized in a variety of ways as arrested development, *Sonderweg* and backwardness. At the same time, the profound change that occurred in these diverse territories as part of a European and in fact global process of modernization during the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries has often not been given its true significance in relation to its later historical development. An array of recent post-colonialist responses that have fundamentally reshaped the history of the modern 'Third World' have touched Eastern Europe only in passing. Hence, an occasional intellectual indecisiveness as to how to analyse the region's development in a greater historical context, as is immediately evident in the diversity of names ascribed to its supposedly different geographical areas – Eastern Europe, East Central Europe, Central Europe, *Mittleuropa* and South-East Europe, to name but a few – each with their own political and ideological bias.

Among several alternative approaches to the region's history that have attempted to approach its often overemphasized peculiarity with a new, critical eye, and at the same time aimed to distinguish the overlaying and all too obvious similarities with other regions inside and outside the Western European 'core', urban history has occupied a significant place. A

large body of recent scholarship, which proudly counts several generations of scholars by now, on what is referred to as Central or alternatively East Central Europe – the region between the Baltic and the Adriatic – has established strong links with Western scholarship and grappled with the latter's attempts to understand modernity as a place- and time-specific process. Scholars working in the shade of Carl E. Schorske, whose *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* continues to challenge traditional historical narratives by focusing on Vienna's special path to modernity, have done a great deal of research on and established profound similarities with the places that a Western reader would place on the 'other' side of the symbolic Iron Curtain.<sup>1</sup> Budapest, Prague, Pressburg, Budweis, Lemberg and Cracow have all received their fair share of renewed attention as part of the recent reevaluation of the imperial legacy in the region. Péter Hanák, especially, ventured into a fruitful dialogue with Schorske by establishing the specificity of Budapest as a turn-of-the-century metropolis vis-à-vis Vienna.<sup>2</sup> A number of scholars of Balkan and Ottoman cities have engaged with each other's respective urban histories and have in consequence generated interesting shared approaches.<sup>3</sup>

Yet much still remains to be said of places that are much more difficult to fit into Schorske's and others' theoretical apparatus – more often than not, these places lie outside the symbolic borders of imperial Austria-Hungary and outside the *fin-de-siècle* narrative. How useful is it to analyse the history of the Balkan and Russian cities using this 'integrationist' methodology and to attempt to establish their development as part of European urbanization? Are we not overlooking a number of significant developments that are profoundly different, and yet equally – if not more – characteristic of the condition of urban modernity across the globe? Is it not time to come to terms with this region's specific development without its teleological bias? Finally, has the development of places that have hitherto been assumed to belong to the European historical narrative, such as Vienna and Budapest, not experienced other, confusing and conflicting phenomena throughout their modern history that would make them comparable with the cities to the east and south-east?

<sup>1</sup> C.E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> P. Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop: Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest* (Princeton, 1998); G. Gyáni, *Identity and the Urban Experience: Fin-de-siècle Budapest* (Boulder, 2004); G.B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914* (Princeton, 1981); C.M. Giustino, *Tearing Down Prague's Jewish Town: Ghetto Clearance and the Legacy of Middle-Class Ethnic Politics Around 1900* (Boulder, 2003); S. Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Kafka's Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley, 2000); E. Babejová, *Fin-de-siècle Pressburg: Conflict and Cultural Coexistence in Bratislava 1897–1914* (Boulder, 2003); J. King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton, 2003); M. Prokopovych, *Habsburg Lemberg: Architecture, Public Space, and Politics in the Galician Capital, 1772–1914* (West Lafayette, 2009); N.D. Wood, *Becoming Metropolitan: Urban Selfhood and the Making of Modern Cracow* (DeKalb, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> J. Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford, 2005); N. Mišković, *Basare und Boulevards: Belgrad im 19. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 2008).

The three contributions to this thematic block contribute to the rethinking of the region each in their own way. Miloš Jovanović takes a fresh look at mid-nineteenth-century Belgrade, the city that has gradually emerged from under the Ottoman rule with a new and energetic ethnic elite that, older political authority prevailing, has failed to single-handedly reshape the city into a homogeneous, European cityscape, and its inhabitants into well-behaved, civilized and good citizens. Jovanović's approach not only addresses Belgrade *before* its *fin-de-siècle* flourish, but also fits it into a greater story of the modernizing Balkans that has recently witnessed a number of excellent case-studies in urban history, especially on places such as Salonica, Athens, Sofia and Sarajevo. What is, however, particularly challenging and insightful about Jovanović's work is that it relates the particular development of Belgrade to greater theoretical issues relevant for the whole Eastern European region and the phenomenon of modernization as a whole: Belgrade's rulers appropriated new methods of urban government and aimed to record, rationalize and frame its population to a particular vision in order to overcome what they perceived as marginalization and backwardness, and in doing so were forced to relate to the notion of the Orient, and the 'other' among this very population, many of whom had actively ignored these attempts by relying on and transforming what remained from the urban tradition of the previous era.

By looking at the residential patterns of *fin-de-siècle* Moscow's working class, Anna Mazanik offers us a fresh view of Russia's 'second' metropolis with its unique social composition and urban development that sheds light on just how diverse the turn-of-the-century urban experience was in places other than Paris, London and New York. Part and parcel of global urbanization, Moscow was also a place where no standard horizontal segregation ever took place. The city became what she calls only a 'transient home' for many among its new migrants: a mass of low-storey buildings where rent did not often correspond to their location, where good neighbourhoods and slums co-existed in the historic centre, where neither the municipal government nor the majority of its heterogeneous population expected a large-scale urban reform ever to take place and where, as Mazanik cleverly paraphrases Marx, the working class had 'even less to lose than elsewhere'. Moscow was not a classic industrial metropolis, and yet its story might be much more comparable to some English cities in the early industrial age rather than to its contemporary equivalents in the West. Such vivid description sheds light not only on the subsequent development of Moscow during and after the 1917 revolution, but also poses important questions concerning the chronology and the spatial scope of what we routinely call the second wave of urbanization.

Finally, Máté Rigó looks at war-time Budapest in 1944–45, a city of 'ordinary women and men', and the place of an extremely tense and complicated relationship between its Jewish and non-Jewish residents, and of particular forms of racial segregation and persecution that,

due to a particular historic constellation, were not typical elsewhere. Budapest has been described in scholarship as the 'Holocaust city', and Jewish persecution in the Hungarian capital has been carefully examined from a number of angles. Rigó brings the Holocaust to the urban level, and Budapest appears in new light now through his analysis of everyday practices on the level of the 'yellow-star houses', tenement buildings assigned as Jewish residences, where the hitherto marginal position of the house superintendent became decisive in both the content and implementation of persecution policies. The fundamental urban characteristic of the Budapest Holocaust relates to greater questions pertaining to the extent to which modernization and modern urban planning influenced the individuals' access to urban space and thus their basic freedoms. In his study, Rigó shows how the space in apartment buildings along with social networks and hierarchies between Jews and non-Jews became key to both persecution and survival in 1944–45. In his own special way, Rigó relates his story of the city from the time of World War II back to the roots of its development half a century earlier, when it had boomed and expanded to an unprecedented extent, and therefore ties it into the greater discussion of urban history in the region initiated by Schorske, Hanák and others.