

Sonia Hirt, Virginia State Polytechnic Institute and State University

Abstract

Compared to the prolific literature on the political and economic aspects of the post-communist transition, literature on post-1989 urban changes, including changes in housing and neighborhood patterns and changes in the quality of life of urban residents, has been relatively limited. Yet the post-communist world stretching from the heart of Europe to the Far East corner of Asia is highly urbanized: out of the nearly half a billion inhabitants of Central-East Europe and the former Soviet Union, about two-thirds reside in cities and towns. Cities were the engines of economic growth during the communist period. They were also at the forefront of radical socio-economic experimentation and restructuring during the transition period.

This paper focuses on urban changes in the Serbian capital of Belgrade: specifically, on the new trend of constructing explicitly private, gated and securitized housing. This type of housing barely existed during communism but established itself as a popular alternative in the 1990s, particularly among the "winners" in the post-communist transition. This new housing pattern, which can now be observed in many other large East European cities as well as cities around the world, reflects deepening social stratification and growing concerns about urban crime. It also suggests an increasing appreciation of privacy and semi-secluded family lifestyles that contrast sharply with the type of urban collectivism communist regimes sought to impose.