

RC21 Conference 2013: Resourceful cities

Berlin, 29-31 August 2013

Session 29: Participation between Consensus and Contestation

On the Nature of Social Capital under Post-Communist Transition: Evidence from Romania

Adriana Mihaela Soaita

Centre for Housing Research, University of St Andrews,

E-mail: ams24@st-andrews.ac.uk

Abstract

Socio-economic and spatial change has visibly marked post-socialist cities, not least their housing environments. Globally, housing governance has engaged neo-liberal strategies of privatism (Barnekov and Rich 1989) that is an increasing reliance on the role of private sector in the production and consumption of housing. Within the post-socialist societies, socio-economic privatism has resonated to specific socio-cultural values of home-centredness and individualism (Gąsior-Niemiec et al. 2009; Hirt and Petrovic 2011). It is now clear that widespread housing problems require coordinated collective action. For instance, the management of privatized socialist blocks requires homeowners' collective engagement. *Ex post facto* utility development in post-socialist suburban settlements necessitates coordinated action between residents and local authorities. Access to scarce resources, whether to public funds or undeveloped urban land, entails competition between places, actors and programmes. However, the extent to which residents are prepared and empowered to engage in the formal and informal structures of civil society in order to promote their agenda in the decision-making process remains an open question (Howard 2003). Drawing on the extensive literature of social capital and using analytical insights from a case study conducted in a paradigmatic post-'socialist city' (Soaita, 2010), this paper aims to elaborate on the changing nature and forms of social capital in Romania and on the factors that best explain their attributes.

Based on established but still divisive definitions of the concept of social capital (Coleman 1988; Portes 2000; Putnam et al. 1994), section 1 examines briefly its main

constituents, outlining their likely positive and negative outcomes. Section 2 argues that socio-economic and political constraints specific to the communism system had negatively influenced the constituents of social capital (Mungiu-Pippidi 2005; Rose 1998). It also illustrates quantitatively the persistent sharp differences in contemporary levels of social capital across countries. After some methodological considerations (section 3), sections 4 and 5 analyze the changing forms of individual and collective social capital, respectively. The paper argues that citizens' non-participation may be seen as a resourceful response against persistent negative forms of social capital, but only inasmuch as citizens are empowered to exert democratic accountability as well as to articulate their agenda in the decision-making process via new and transparent institutionalised channels.

References:

- Barnekov, T., and Rich, D. (1989). "Privatism and the limits of local economic development policy." *Urban Affairs Review*, 25(2), 212-238.
- Coleman, J.S. (1988). "Social capital in the creation of human capital." *The American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120.
- Gașior-Niemiec, A., Glasze, G., and Pütz, R. (2009). "A Glimpse over the Rising Walls." *East European Politics & Societies*, 23(2), 244-265.
- Hirt, S., and Petrovic, M. (2011). "The Belgrade wall: The proliferation of gated housing in the Serbian capital after socialism." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35(4), 753–777.
- Howard, M.M. (2003). *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2005). "Deconstructing Balkan particularism: The ambiguous social capital of Southeastern Europe." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 5(1), 49-68
- Portes, A. (2000). "The two meanings of social capital." *Sociological Forum*, 15(1), 1-12.
- Putnam, R.D., Leonardi, R., and Nanetti, R. (1994). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rose, R. (1998). "Getting things done in an anti-modern society: social capital networks in Russia" *Social Capital Initiative Working Paper Series*, 1-23.
- Soaita, A.M. (2010). *Unregulated Housing Privatism: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature and Extent of Housing Problems and Resident Responses in Two Forms of Romanian Urban Housing*, PhD, King's College London.