

2. Economic Geography and Economic Crisis

Understanding geographies of post-socialist economies: invoking the arts

MÁRTON CZIRFUSZ

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Introduction

In the past more than two decades the post-socialist condition (cf. STENNING, A. and HÖRSCHELMANN, K. 2008) meant not only significant changes in our lives as citizens of Central and Eastern European countries, but also raised new issues in geography as a discipline. Economic geography is one of the subdisciplines which faced multiple challenges after 1989. On one hand it is dragging the intellectual baggage of socialist (Marxist-Leninist) ideology, on the other hand rapid economic change of the transformation period brings new formations, institutions and practices into being, for the examination of which old epistemologies and methodologies did not offer any appropriate key. In the meantime, economic geography in the West has gone through different turns (such as the relational, the visual or the cultural turn) as a consequence of productive exchange of ideas with social theories, all of which offered brand-new tools for understanding the world around us (BARNES, T., PECK, J., SHEPPARD, E. and TICKELL, A. 2007).

In the present paper I would like to show that recent approaches in Western economic geography are also valuable for geographers who hope to understand economic phenomena in post-socialism either in the East or in the West. In detail I'll try to highlight on an example of a recent exhibition in Múcsarnok (Hall of Arts) Budapest how different works of art may enlighten new, 'scientifically' marginally examined, but deeply geographical aspects of post-socialist economies.

The paper is structured as follows: firstly, by the review of some ideas about post-socialism and economic geography I bring together two strands of the theoretical literature. Secondly, I evaluate which role arts can play in human geography in general and in economic geography in particular, through

a brief deconstruction of the economic-cultural divide. Thirdly, drawing on an example of a recent exhibition about phenomena of post-socialist economies in contemporary art I outline some possible research questions and answers for a deeper understanding of geographies of post-socialist economies.

Connecting post-socialism and economic geography

As JUDIT TIMÁR argues, ‘after the changeover of 1989 East Central Europe attracted the attention of Western scholars’ (TIMÁR, J. 2004, p. 534). Since geographers and other social theorists agree that the two main characteristics of post-socialist transformation were the adoption of a Western style political democracy and a market oriented economic transformation (PICKLES, J. 2008b; SMITH, A. 2002; ȚICHINDELEANU, O. 2010a), it is not surprising that several monographs tackled these issues from a geographical point of view either on the macro- (e.g. HERRSCHEL, T. 2007; PICKLES, J. 2008a; PICKLES, J. and SMITH, A. 1998) or on the micro-scale (e.g. STENNING, A., SMITH, A., ROCHOVSKÁ, A. and ŚWIĄTEK, D. 2010). All these ‘Western’ writings connecting theoretical argumentations about post-socialism and economic geography (still not a beloved research agenda in the East) are as variegated as variegated the capitalisms (BIRCH, K. and MYKHENKO, V. 2009; PECK, J. and THEODORE, N. 2007) of the objects of their studies are. In this chapter I follow these strands of literature and draw conclusions for the Hungarian and a broader Central and Eastern European context.

1989 ‘represented an “end”, the final proof of the inadequacies of the Marxist “grand narrative”’ (HÖRSCHELMANN, K. 2002, p. 52), and it also led to a ‘post-ing’ of socialism, to a de-legitimization of the Soviet-type shortage models (SMITH, A. and TIMÁR, J. 2010). Several authors (e.g. HÖRSCHELMANN, K. 2002; STENNING, A. and HÖRSCHELMANN, K. 2008) argue though that there is a relative absence of works concerning the theoretically inspired critique of the new ‘era’. The most important reason for that in my opinion is the fact that most geographers living in the post-socialist region failed to notice that they became post-socialists as well, which by definition would necessitate not only a thematic turn in their work but also an epistemological one; i.e. their understanding of the world around us should have completely changed with the transformation.

Differences between a thematic and an epistemological change within post-socialist geographies can be better understood through the concept of four waves of transition studies put forward by PICKLES, J. (2008b). According to him, first wave studies were centred around policy issues of economic reforms in transformation countries, then in the second wave increasing social inequalities as a result of the economic collapse and reorientation were at the

heart of the research agenda. Scholarly writing focused on the spatially and socially uneven development of the region in the third phase; whereas it was only in the fourth wave when logics and theories of transition studies became objects of scrutiny. Although I am questioning PICKLES' slightly teleological and essentialist suggestion that geographical research follows such a sequence getting nearer to a deeper layer of transformation phenomena in each phase, he suitably makes certain turns and epistemological changes visible. His distinctions are also helpful in making clear how different ways of seeing in (economic) geography are possible and that all of these are (more or less) useful in understanding the post-socialist world around us.

One way of dealing with the epistemological turn of post-socialism in the geographical practice is the nine points programme of STENNING, A. and HÖRSCHELMANN, K. (2008, pp. 325–329). Although the authors' article is about connecting post-colonial theoretical literature with post-socialist notions, I argue that theirs is a more nuanced and broader view than merely 'applying' post-colonialism for post-socialism. As the last part of my paper is based around this programmatic statement I recall here the nine points briefly.

1. Translating the past to the present: posting socialism. As post-socialism comes also against the grain of socialism, we need to do research on the process of translating socialism into post-socialism.

2. The presence of the pre- and post-socialist. We should analyse how pre-socialism, socialism, and post-socialism are blended together in the present.

3. Multiple post-socialisms. Geographically uneven development is the outcome of the complex translation of the varied past which means a difference in discourses and practices too.

4. Rethinking the socialist past. It is not only possible but necessary to rethink the socialist past and find new research topics in it.

5. Methodologies for the "post". Post-socialism encourages us to rethink our methodologies and extend on them.

6. Rethinking relationships with the West. We have to think about the West not as a primary reference point.

7. Locating post-socialism relationally. Post-socialism should be articulated with other times and spaces, in line with the broader relational turn in geography (see e.g. YEUNG, H.W-C. 2005).

8. We're all post-socialist now: post-socialism in the West. The West is also affected by post-socialism, we may turn to the research of post-socialism in the West.

9. Persistent post-socialism. We must not speak about post-socialism as a transitory category. It exists also today, did not end with the EU-accession as some scholars see (e.g. GORZELAK, G. and GOH, C-C. 2010).

Apparently, the programme of STENNING and HÖRSCHELMANN thematise a broad understanding of the post-socialist condition, it is not

focused on economic geography. However, the nine points are also applicable to economic geographical scrutiny. As BARNES concludes in his article 'new economic geography [not in the Krugmanian sense – my addition] is located theoretically on the borderlands between geography, economics (typically political economy), cultural studies, and various kinds of sociology' (BARNES, T. 2001, p. 559). Consequently, economic geography may also be inspired by ideas of the Stenning–Hörschelmann programme.

I mention at this point just a few ideas and will turn to these in detail from the perspective of artistic representations in the last part of the paper. The third point, multiple post-socialism (see the third wave of PICKLES) has a vivid group of literature also for researchers of post-socialist countries. Locating the 'winners' and 'losers' of post-socialist transformation (e.g. ENYEDI, GY. 1996; FASSMANN, H. 1997), their similar or distinct development paths is important in understanding phenomena of transition on the macro-level, but the writings often do not represent any epistemological change. In contrast, under methodologies for the post an important refocusing is taking place: micro-level analyses with new, ethnographic methodologies regain acceptance in post-socialist economic geography (see for example HÖRSCHELMANN, K. and STENNING, A. 2008 for a theoretical review; STENNING, A., SMITH, A., ROCHOVSKÁ, A. and ŚWIĄTEK, D. 2010 for an empirical research). As a third example, the recent paper of PERRONS, D. PLOMIEN, A. and KILKEY, M. (2010) link multiple points (rethinking relationship with the West in a relational way and observing post-socialism in the West) in studying male migrant workers from post-socialist countries in the United Kingdom. Although the authors only refer to the stereotype of the 'Polish plumber' in their argumentation, turning to the representation of it in media or in branding (the Polish Tourism Board made a media campaign using the character in a positive context) could be a project which not only links economic geography and post-socialism but also extends the research field to the cultural aspects.

Connecting arts and economic geography

Economy and culture are two powerful ideas which organise thought and practice, both in the arts, media, even among geographers (CASTREE, N. 2004). As such, these two terms are not an ontological category, or as CASTREE, N. (2004) extends beyond MITCHELL, D.'s (1995) argument, there's no such thing as culture or economy.

In addition, telling apart culture and economy got outdated after 'cultural turn' found a way into economic geography. Relations of culture and economy turned out to be the new subject of study (see the relational turn in post-socialist studies referred to earlier in the paper). Culture and economy

are not anymore understood as a binary, they became a hybrid (BARNES, T. 2005). BARNES' paper emphasise that hybrids 'provide the possibility for thinking outside traditional dualisms' (BARNES, T. 2005, p. 69) and that they make 'connections between types and objects of enquiry that because of binary thinking have been hitherto kept separate' (BARNES, T. 2005, p. 70). This kind of understanding surely opens up economic geography towards culture (arts included); the economic in cultural products can be objects of scrutiny. This transformation shall result in a methodological pluralism (cf. BARNES, T., PECK, J., SHEPPARD, E. and TICKELL, A. 2007), as well as in new questions and new topics in human geography in general. New directions can include researching the economised realm of culture, culturally embedded economic activities, the representation of the economic through culturally specific discourses, or how the economic is materialised through the cultural (CASTREE, N. 2004 citing CRANG, P.'s 1997 paper).

Another link between the two concepts of culture and economy is a recent shift in the literature which emphasise the importance of socioeconomic practices in economic geography. As social actions 'through and within which diverse actors (...) and communities (...) organize materials, produce, consume, and/or derive meaning from the economic world' (JONES, A. and MURPHY, J-T. forthcoming, p. 2) can include artistic practices as well, new topics in economic geography may emerge which until then were mostly a realm of cultural geographers. A recent writing doing research in this direction is CRANG, M.'s (2010) paper on photographic representations of Bangladeshi shipbreaking. Looking both at economic practices of photographed people, artistic representation as a social practice and discursive practices of photographers (their writings on photography), CRANG achieves his goal to 'reveal the hidden underside of capitalism' (CRANG, M. 2010, p. 1084) and opens up a space of critical readings of culture-economy relations. The same interest in social practice is in the centre of COOK, I.'s 'imaginative engagement' (COOK, I. 2000, p. 343) with an artwork of SHELLEY SACKS on the nature of capitalism shown on the example of the banana industry. On one hand the researcher's practice is the same: he offers a critical reading of the installation (and the artistic practice within that), on the other hand Cook's article goes one step further. By extending the field he not only observes the artwork from the 'outside' but scrutinises the researcher's practice (the act of writing) with the very same methods as the artwork itself (see for example Cook's use of short sentences – a kind of mimicking – as he is commenting on the banana growers' recorded speeches in the installation). And more, by engaging with 'a social sculpture (...) made out of dialogues and things' (Cook, I. 2000, p. 341) Cook also urges geographers to concentrate on *both* the discursive and the material (see also the comment of THRIFT, N. and OLDS, K. 1996 on the rise of the representational as a new problematisation in economic geography).

Although papers like that of Cook dissolve the borders between the arts and geography, if one looks at writings of artists which somehow thematise the sphere of the economic, new connections can be explored. CRANG, M.'s (2010) paper cites the American photographer ALLAN SEKULA's theoretical writings. CRANG is mainly interested in SEKULA's occupation with ships, sea and capitalism (through his book *Fish Story*), but is not emphasising his engagement with geography. SEKULA's reading of the relationship between places, landscapes and capitalism – for example in his paper with geography also in its title (SEKULA, A. 1988) – is not far from that of the criticized new cultural geography, i.e. that the landscape is a material product within which particular ideologies are coded (cf. MITCHELL, D. 1995; CRESSWELL, T. 2003). In the brochure of his recent exhibition in Budapest entitled *Polonia and other fables* one of the curators tellingly observes that *Fish Story* gives a current economic geographic picture of so-called post-industrial society (Ludwig Museum 2010). Moreover, some projects of SEKULA are focusing on post-socialism, such as *Walking on Water* (1990–1995) – also on show in the Budapest exhibition –, in which a slideshow taken in Gdańsk is looking at the posting of socialism and behind the post-socialist economic transformation of an industrial city; it asks questions like whether or not *Solidarność* in the end wound up the working class it was originally representing. In this paper I will not go into details on questions and topics formulated by SEKULA (the last part will give a closer reading of artist's works) or how for example CRESSWELL's argumentation shows similarities with JONES and MURPHY's. I aimed here only at highlighting that geography and concepts mostly regarded as being in the realm of geography are present in thinking of artists.

Following CASTREE, N. that '[t]he creation and attachment of meanings is a social process that undoubtedly refers to a "real world" but (and it is an important but) in specific ways, for specific reasons and with particular consequences' (CASTREE, N. 2004, p. 216, emphasis in the original) it is almost trivial that the arts, artworks and artists do have a role in constructing meanings on 'the economic', and that meanings are different in a post-socialist context than elsewhere (not only meant geographically). Additionally, as they refer to the world, there is also something inherently geographical in them as they (re) create geographical imaginations of the economic. I shall demonstrate these ideas with reference to a recent exhibition.

Post-socialist economies: geographies of an exhibition

In this last chapter I'll try to elaborate more on some issues touched upon in the previous parts through a reflection on a recent exhibition at the Múcsarnok (Hall of Arts) in Budapest, entitled *Over the counter – The phenomena*

of post-socialist economy in contemporary art. Although the foreword of the exhibition catalogue states that the exhibition and the whole project 'was sparked by the global economic crisis that began in 2008' (ANGEL, J. 2010a, p. 8) it also makes clear that the artists coming 'from the post-socialist region (...) through their personal everyday experiences they present the most immediate effects of the economy on everyday life' (ANGEL, J. 2010a, p. 8). This more-embracing (i.e. post-socialism and not only the crisis) concept, as well as the implications for the wider society and for the geography as a discipline are also underpinned by the curators' view. One of them writes that 'if one of the purposes of contemporary art can be to interact with the community it is created in, then the economic crisis and related issues provide the best opportunity to launch a project that reflects on our past and present, by way of presenting together works by artists who, from various motivations, have dealt with economic issues over the past 20 years' (PETRÁNYI, Zs. 2010, p. 136), whereas the other one formulates these issues that the exhibition 'addresses, through various art practices, some economic phenomena from the last two decades of the post-socialist region, the social processes and situations that have unfolded as a result of the changes, as well as certain economic contradictions of the regime change' (LÁZÁR, E. 2010, p. 156). The line of argumentation that the economic crisis exposed weaknesses and contradictions of the post-socialist neo-liberal economic development model is – through marginally – also present in the geographical literature (SOKOL, M. and ROCHOVSKÁ, A. 2010), and I also agree with the critical but optimistic notion of the same paper that post-socialist geographies are ill-prepared to cope with the fallout of the economic crisis, but they can mobilise intellectual potential (SOKOL, M. and ROCHOVSKÁ, A. 2010).

Exhibitions and museums are highly valuable objects of scrutiny for geographers also because they can be interpreted as heterotopias. The term heterotopia, introduced by MICHEL FOUCAULT, is used for places 'in which (...) real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (FOUCAULT, M. 1986, p. 24). Although in Foucault's interpretation museums first of all represent 'the will to enclose in one place all times' (FOUCAULT, M. 1986, p. 26), for us, geographers it is also important that they often try to represent multiple places, enframe the totality of the world, or produce a world-as-exhibition (cf. GREGORY, D. 1994). Translating CRANG, M.'s (2010, p. 1086) argumentation to the context of the specific exhibition, the artworks are becoming heterotopias, 'microcosms of globalized space' as they reflect on the economies of post-socialism, and through them lessons can be drawn on the 'whole' post-socialist condition in relation to socialism as well. A good example for this notion is the series of photographs by MLADEN STILINOVIĆ entitled *Bag people*. The artist took pictures of impoverished people (with their bags) living their local lives, and each photo is matched with a page from a

newspaper showing mostly global news (ANGEL, J. 2010b, p. 222). In this way, he creates heterotopias by connecting socialism and post-socialism, local and global societies and economies on small, closed spaces of a back and a front of sheets.

In this paper I only can aim to put forward a partial, reflexive and subjective geographical reading of the aforementioned exhibition. Geographies appear not only as a region from where the artists come, but some works of art are deeply geographical in a way that they are dealing exactly with the same issues that of the Stenning–Hörschelmann programme (STENNING, A. and HÖRSCHELMANN, K. 2008). Consequently, they may have something to offer for a geographer as well.

Articulation of pre-socialism and pre-socialist geographies is present in different ways in the artworks of the exhibition, like that of IMRE BUKTA. The catalogue of the exhibition states that '[a]rtists who present the personal aspects of country life in as systematic a manner as Imre Bukta are rare' (ANGEL, J. 2010b, p. 174). The catalogue slightly misrepresents BUKTA's works as it implicitly groups them together with documentary photography's renewed interest 'in agriculture, with photographers setting out to present the underdeveloped state of the countryside as part of a whole and complete picture of the world' (ANGEL, J. 2010b, p. 174); in my reading what we are facing with in his artworks is more the 'plural reality' of alternative economies (cf. ȚICHINDELEANU, O. 2010b, p. 113 in the same book) and geographical imaginations of agriculture interlinked through different times (mostly pre-socialism and socialism). Another example is the video of YURI LEIDERMAN entitled *Geopoetics-4 (Greeks sit on the edge of the bench)*, which links antique Greece and a 1987 painting by Leiderman (representing socialism) in a post-socialist field of meaning.

One of the recurring themes of rethinking the socialist past is the figure of the worker, or more generally the relevance of social classes in post-socialism. There is an important strand of literature in human geography to rethink classes as 'active, ongoing and negotiable sets of practices that vary across time and space' (McDOWELL, L. 2008, p. 21). *After the Order*, a photo-collage by ANETTA MONA CHIȘA and LUCIA TKÁČOVÁ shows two parts of a human pyramid, one performed at a socialist ceremony (with people in uniform clothes), the other 'remade' in post-socialism (with people from different classes and genders, representing the manifold divisions of the 'new' society). Moreover, as the artwork was inspired by an illustration published in a US magazine at the beginning of the 20th century, it also makes connections between three different eras or modes of economy. In the light of the Stenning–Hörschelmann programme, it is important that the photo-collage arouse consciousness to social inequality. I am not sympathetic though with the catalogue's explanation that this 'intervention demonstrates how the amnesia that gradually eliminates people's adherence to the ideology of

the past facilitates the replacement of actual freedom with the elements and attributes of a free market economy' (ANGEL, J. 2010b, p. 180), and I share more the views of STENNING and HÖRSCHELMANN that rethinking post-socialism also includes interpreting 'post-socialisms and the legacies of socialism in ways that avoid determinism and that incorporate not only that which is posted but also earlier, uneven histories and geographies' (STENNING, A. and HÖRSCHELMANN, K. 2008, p. 330), which means that in relation to socialism amnesia is to be countered.

New methodologies for the post are not available only for geography, but also for the arts. KATERINA ŠEDÁ's installation explores how the life of Nošovice, a village in the Czech Republic was radically transformed, how local community fell apart in post-socialism after Hyundai built up a new car production plant there. KRISTINA LEKO's installation, *A short history of mining*, is not only 'simple' objects brought together on a local history of mining in the former Yugoslavia, as the sources themselves emerged through a community art and documentary project. The ideas and the methods of the two artists show many similarities with GIBSON-GRAHAM, J-K.'s action researches (GIBSON-GRAHAM, J-K. 2006), highly influential in the human geography. Both the action researches and the artworks look at places which 'have experienced economic dislocation' in order to see the 'heterogeneous (capitalist and noncapitalist) economies of these' (GIBSON-GRAHAM, J-K. 2006, p. xxii). KRISTINA LEKO and KATERINA ŠEDÁ give insight into the complex (hi)stories and identities of a locality, with artworks presented in many forms. In this way they also criticize our (geographical) understanding of a homogeneous post-socialist restructuring of places, question capitalist transformation, and link the projects also to STENNING and HÖRSCHELMANN's third point of multiple post-socialisms.

Rethinking the relationship with the West and locating post-socialism relationally with other places comes also in the forefront of some artworks. The Romanian artist, DAN PERJOVSCHI is sensible of the transformation of Central and Eastern European societies, economies and politics. His satirical caricatures (simply drawn on the white wall with black colour) touch upon complex issues of post-socialism. One of them thematises stereotypic and simplistic economic and demographic differences, our common imaginative geographies (cf. for example GREGORY, D. 1994) of Europe. On the picture two identical old men stand with bent back, the one representing 'Old Europe' leaning on a stick, the 'New Europe' man on a pitchfork in contrast. In this way PERJOVSCHI is able to show the common characteristics of people within Europe and allows space for difference as well. Of course, it is highly questionable that only Western European societies shall face the phenomenon of ageing (compare for example fertility rates across European countries, there will not be any huge difference between East and West), or that Eastern Europe

would be equal to agriculture. PERJOVSCHI combines a demographic (West) and an economic feature in his caricature in an interesting way, he mobilises our common stereotypes, represents and reproduces container spaces (cf. SCHLOTTMANN, A. 2008) of East and West, but (and this is also an important but) critiques these understandings as well.

Another drawing of PERJOVSCHI points to post-socialism as an era of transition. Two words, 'socialism' and 'capitalism' written under each other form the picture, socialism's letters decreasing to the right, whereas that of capitalism are increasing. PERJOVSCHI refers here to the misreading that after the rupture of 1989 all that is socialism melted into the air. This idea of ruptures is shared by many geographers, see for example ENYEDI, Gy.'s (2005) theory that 1989 represented a creative destruction in a Schumpeterian term which literally drew a new economic geographical map of Eastern Europe virtually overnight. PERJOVSCHI's drawing in my opinion can engage geographers to think critically on issues of time and space in post-socialism, or as ȚICHINDELEANU, O. (2010a) argues, how post-communism converts space into time with the myth of catching-up. Theoretisations of the whys and hows of socialist and post-socialist togetherness and its geographical research would be urgent.

PERJOVSCHI's geographical imaginations do not explicitly include post-socialism in the West. Another artist of the exhibition, MATEI BEJENARU is interested exactly in this relational post-socialism in 'Old Europe'. His installation and leaflet entitled *Travel guide* documents labour flows of the 1990s from Romania to the United Kingdom. The travel guide offers useful tips how to get into England and it also depicts a schematised railway map with possible routes. This map can be an important source and an object of study in understanding selective Eastern geographical imaginations, where only departure cities, interchanges and border stations are of importance. The Moldavian part of Romania (the source of migration) is represented in detail, Hungary is only four border crossings and three other cities; Slovenia is just two border stations, Germany's huge rectangle consists of only one city, Munich. Europe's different parts (the main division being Schengen / non-Schengen zone) are linked together with (il)legal flows of people. BEJENARU's project also can illuminate how unstable these mobilities are: EU accession of former Eastern Bloc countries, Schengen accession of new member states, new visa regulations for Romanian citizens, low-cost airlines, or free movement of workers within the EU (without restrictions in the future) each dramatically affect flows of people and BEJENARU's map.

To round up the discussion of the exhibition, STENNING and HÖRSCHELMANN's last point, the persistent nature of post-socialism is vividly shown by most of the artworks, even though the picture is, as ȚICHINDELEANU observes, very complex, because 'art is not only a vehicle for social change (...), but the artist has to create also the context in which it is possible at all to

articulate a general critique' (ȚICHINDELEANU, O. 2010b, p. 114). What he means is that the arts shall create a space where one can argue for a persistent post-socialism. The same is true for geography in Central and Eastern Europe; in spite of that we have been since more than 20 years in this situation, there is a lot left to do (cf. TIMÁR, J. 2003).

Conclusions

Museums are sites which generate meaning and are able to reproduce dominant structures of knowledge (CRAMPTON, A. 2003). Of importance here is that the *Over the counter* exhibition does (re)produce meanings on post-socialism but at the same time it opens up critical spaces by reflecting on and deconstructing dominant structures of knowledge. In this way, museums and exhibitions are an inspiring field of a geographical study, because both geography and arts have somehow the same goal (if one can write of any), namely to understand the complexity of the world around us and within which we are conducting our everyday life.

As Țichindeleanu writes in his recent paper, '[t]hanks to (...) works, especially from the visual arts, the study of postcommunism has the chance of developing into an original field of critical theory' (ȚICHINDELEANU, O. 2010a, p. 31). I could not ask more for geography in Central and Eastern Europe than to be critical on the post-socialist condition and post-socialist economies. It does not, of course, necessitate studying visual arts, but as I argued in my paper visual arts can offer a more nuanced and a more pluralistic understanding of the world around us than doing research only in the 'classic' realm of economic geography.

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