

THE RISE OF THE REGULATORY STATE AND PRODUCTION OF UNEVEN CONSUMPTION LANDSCAPES IN EAST AND CENTRAL EUROPE

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Abstract: In the past three decades, subsequent changes occurred in institutional practices and the scalar organisation of the state throughout East and Central Europe (ECE). The processes were embedded into the global trends of state restructuring such as rise of the regulationist state/the devolution of state power rooted in changing state-market relations. The slowly emerging and inconsistent regulatory framework of retail and consumption in ECE reflected the above trends as well as the particular political and the socio-cultural contexts of the emerging markets, and contributed to the development of highly uneven consumption landscapes shaped dominantly by corporate strategies. My paper is focused on the critical analysis of political discourses over the regulative role of the state in these specific fields and on the related institutional practices. In particular, I focus on the ways and on the contexts of interpreting socio-spatial inequalities in relation to consumption issues. I argue for

- considering regulation regimes as the products of shifting power relations that had been dominated by the coalitions of national political elites and supra/transnational agents in the transition period exploiting the structural deficiencies and ideological potentials of the post-shortage economies and later, by the rise of domestic capitalists' groups (retailers, developers, producers) that pressed national political elites to renegotiate the regulation of the crisis-hit markets;
- understanding how the problems of socio-spatial inequalities and the issue of citizenship (national, local, etc.) were exploited by each powerful group to realize their strategies – reproducing unevenness.

I discuss the Hungarian context more in depth as a “laboratory” characterised by highly concentrated and contested market relations and by unprecedented direct (regulative) interventions of the nation state from 2010 on.

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