1

Introduction

"Thus, when the universal sun has gone down, the moth seeks the lamplight of the private world."

Karl Marx

One of the most enduring images of the twentieth century was the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. Erected overnight in 1961 with barbed wire and later reconstructed with concrete and reinforced with guards and traps, the Wall was far more than an ugly physical barrier. It was—and for many of us, still is, even in its extinction—the iconic emblem of fear and division, the ultimate material symbol of "us" and "them" apart. The Wall was dismantled by ecstatic crowds on both sides of Berlin during several weeks in late 1989 and early 1990. The popular slogan “No more wars, no more walls, a united world” remained graffitied on its decrepit but still-standing blocks well through 1990.

Today, more than twenty years after the Wall's collapse, it is obvious that the united world, whatever the meaning of this elusive term may be, never materialized. Some walls fell, but many others were erected: some visible, like the US–Mexico border walls; and some less visible, like the new borders of the European Union, which now set apart a slightly expanded geographic version of the civilized West from its less deserving East European “others.”

This book is about wall-making in Eastern Europe since the end of socialism. I believe that contrary to the expectations raised by the optimistic images of 1989, the last twenty years of East European history have been an exceptionally prolific period as far as wall-making goes. There are now all kinds of walls, material and immaterial, economic and political, legal and
social, which separate the newly rich from the newly poor, and the “right” from the “wrong” ethnicities. Some walls, of course, existed well before 1989 but have now become more solid. There also are many brand new walls in the form of state borders and partitioned cities.

Perhaps none of this new partitioning should be surprising. Spatial instability and border reconfiguration accompany most major societal overhauls, and the post-1989 systemic transformation—a time of radical “boundary instability” (Andrusz 1996) that brought an end to socialist multi-ethnic federalisms—has been a perfect illustration. The borders of what was once intended as a politically and economically homogeneous super-bloc stretching from the heart of Europe to the Far East corner of Asia—a super-bloc demarcated on its western side by the Berlin Wall—were dissolved. As globalization and the communications revolution undercut the ability of states to remain the primary scale on which socio-economic management is performed (Brenner et al. 2003; Brenner 2004a, 2004b), state borders caved in too; some vanished altogether, and new ones were created as new identities and alliances were formed. Still, what I find surprising is the raw dynamism with which a new border-building erupted after 1989 on a smaller, urban scale. The cities of Eastern Europe—sites of stark new social contrasts—were in a few short years invaded by a myriad of new ruptures and enclosures. In the process, their open, borderless, shared spaces were severely depreciated. Peculiarly then, the global “space of flows” that the Information Age (Castells 1989) brought to us all seems to be making its own anti-thesis: a local space of bounds.

This book tells the story of boundary-building, vanishing public space, and the rescaling of enclosure in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia. It is a personal book: I tell the story of my hometown even if I tell it through the lens of my experience as a scholar and professional who has spent the last eighteen years in the United States. My subject matter is the city, its form, its style, its planning. I analyze the changing urbanity of Sofia and show that the post-socialist period has been one of intensive corrosion of the collective urban realm and equally intensive construction of divided, explicitly private spaces, many of which are bounded by daunting physical barriers. The most obvious example is the new generation of fortressed homes—the local version of the “block-homes” that Steven Flusty (1997) described in Los Angeles. Such homes, which barely existed during socialism (only the top echelon of party apparatchiks had them), are individually fenced off, likely in response to the security concerns of a newly rich class surrounded by a sea of poverty. They began to spread around Sofia right after 1989 and attained the status of the new norm in residential architecture in the late 1990s. Their latest incarnation comes in the form of large, Western-style gated communities, many of which now “adorn” the city’s sprawling outskirts. The phenomenon is not limited to
Sofia. There is a burgeoning literature on expensive gated housing in the post-socialist world, especially in wealthier cities like Moscow, Prague and Budapest (e.g., Bodnar 2001; Blinnikov et al. 2006; Cséfalvay 2009), where social contrasts are equally stark but global capital is more abundant. In fact if one combined all the iron, concrete, bricks and mortar that surround the new gated homes in East European cities (not to mention other types of enclosure), the sum would likely dwarf the volume of concrete used in the 150-kilometer-long, four-meter-tall Berlin Wall by a massive ratio.

I do not mean to ignore the blatant contrasts between the Berlin Wall and its miniature successors: there is a principal difference between walls made to keep insiders in (e.g., the Berlin Wall and prison gates) and walls made to keep outsiders out (e.g., those around residential compounds; Marcuse 1997). Still, there is an intrinsic commonality: walls set borders; they part; they make an “us” and “them.”

The example of upscale, walled housing in Sofia is but part of the story. A wider process of border-setting and fragmentation (and, since we are in the Balkans, shall we say balkanization?) of urban space is occurring. This process elevates the protection of private space, not only from crime but from any other perceived intrusions by “others,” as a dominant cultural ideal at the expense of a perpetually shrinking public realm. I see it in dilapidated housing towers left over from socialism, where even urban residents of the most modest means have collected sufficient funds to install new locks and hire security guards to monitor the building entrance twenty-four hours a day. I see this in shiny supermarkets and glitzy business parks, often built by Western developers, which turn their backs to the city and are accessible only through a few controlled gates. I see this in vanishing playgrounds, quickly turned into paid parking, and in disappearing parkland transformed into private sports complexes, whose fences are installed before the local government could issue building permits. I see it in the exclusive far-flung new suburbs, where public infrastructure is so minimal that owning a Land Rover is a prerequisite to visiting them. And I see it in the new architecture — a generation of triumphantly individualistic buildings, whose stylistic purpose is to stand apart, shine alone, disconnect themselves from the street, or, in the words of one Bulgarian cultural critic, declare “war” on their neighbors (Dandolova 2002). I call it the architecture of disunity.

What drives this extraordinary process of urban partitioning, of shrinking urban publicness? To a great extent, its roots can be found in the changes in economic and political environment that ensued after 1989, especially the shift of power from the public to the private sector. The hypothesis this study explores, however, is that changes in the urban environment are not only dependent on post-socialist changes in politics and economics. Rather, to the extent to which space is a medium of culture, the changing urbanity of Sofia is the story of the post-socialist cultural condition. The story follows
from forty-five years of failed totalitarian attempts to sell a heroic philosophy dedicated to elevating the public good and defeating petty private interests—a time when the private home was the sole place of passive resistance against the state. The story continues for another twenty years, during which another heroic narrative—that of Western democracy—also grounded in some brave assumptions for a noble public realm, produced ambiguous results at best: results including the quick turnover of public resources to private parties, many of whom abused their public positions (e.g., the old nomenklatura) or rose to wealth by breaking the rules designed to keep a public realm alive (e.g., the new mafia). In this sense, I see the story of fragmenting public space in Sofia as a subset of a much broader condition. I call this condition privatism, privatism with a passion and a vengeance. Unlike privatization, which is an economic and political process of transferring material resources, privatism is a cultural condition which comes in reaction to the perceived gross failures of the socialist and post-socialist public realm. I believe it expresses itself in space much as it expresses itself in, say, corruption, law-breaking and tax-evasion—all common post-socialist social practices. Privatism in my definition is the widespread disbelief in a benevolent public realm and the widespread sense that to appropriate the public may be the best way to thrive in private: To secede is to succeed.

I use the term Iron Curtains, which Winston Churchill coined fifteen years before the Berlin Wall was built, to express this process of urban secessionism and turning inward. It is a process of expanding the private, shrinking the public, and firming the border between them; it is a process of curtaining off, walling off and cutting off. Perhaps ironically, I find a metaphor that Karl Marx used in his dissertation to most vividly capture the swing from official socialist publicness to popular post-socialist privatism, in culture and in space. It is the metaphor of the nocturnal moth: when the universal sun goes down, Marx said, the moth seeks shelter in “the lamplight of the private world” (Marx and Engels 1975). Socialism—arguably the culmination of Western modernity (Bauman 1991; Havel 1992b, 1994)—promised to be that universal sun. Its demise ushered in, in Zygmunt Bauman’s words, the ultimate “swarming time for nocturnal moths” (Bauman 1995).

Notes on Significance and Methodology

Through an in-depth case study, the book contributes to the literatures on post-socialist social, spatial and cultural change, modernity and postmodernity, and globalization and urbanization. Even though empirical observations are derived nominally from a single city, their analysis is positioned within a global theoretical framework and is further enriched by perpetual references to processes of urban transformation that occur
in other parts of the world – not only in other post-socialist contexts in Central and Eastern Europe, but also in Western Europe and the United States. Therefore, the study is an example of the implicitly comparative or quasi-comparative method (Bodnar 2001).

Countries like Bulgaria and cities like Sofia occupy a peripheral position in the literature (that is, Sofia’s urbanism has never been the subject of an analytical English-language monograph, and Bulgaria is one of the most understudied East European nations; Ganev 2007). Sofia is neither a London nor a New York; it is not even a Moscow. It does not belong to the world of privileged “global cities” that seem to arouse an insatiable curiosity in urban scholars. Yet, in focusing on it, I second Robinson’s (2006) call for studying “ordinary cities” (or, rather, her call for treating all cities as ordinary) – an approach that allows us to explore the complexity and uniqueness of urban places without perpetually forcing them into some hierarchical system and, consequently, neglecting all but the top tier.

So what exactly can one learn from a book on Sofia? Why should a scholar of post-socialist cultures or post-socialist urbanism read a case-based monograph? More broadly, why should a scholar of global urban transformations read about a particular post-socialist city? My answer is as follows. The book is ultimately about privatization as a socio-economic process and privatism as a cultural condition, both of which are global in scope and integral to contemporary, post-modern capitalism. Post-socialist urbanity embodies privatization and privatism in such an unmediated, unrestrained form that it allows us to observe them with greater clarity than in Western settings, where their socio-spatial outcomes have been more gradual and subtle (Bodnar 2001; Humphrey 2002). Sofia, where predatory privatization and a dramatic decline of publicness have been the leitmotifs of the post-socialist period, provides an especially poignant example – one that comes very close to the extreme, exemplary case study that theorists of qualitative methodology describe (Yin 1984).

The study focuses on the privatization of space – one of the most important aspects of post-modern urban change, which has been thoroughly studied in Western cities (Sorkin 1992; Davis 1990; Ellin 1996, 1997; Dear 2000). It does so, however, in the under-analyzed post-socialist context. It makes the case that although privatization of urban space may be a global process, in post-socialist settings it has erupted with an astonishing virility not only because of the specific political and economic circumstances, but also because of the vigor of post-socialist privatism as a cultural condition.

In short, then, as the sole monograph on contemporary urbanism in a Southeast European capital, the book seeks to make a broader statement on issues of post-socialist urbanism in the tradition of several recent in-depth studies of East-Central European cities, such as Budapest (Bodnar 2001),
Berlin (Till 2005), and St. Petersburg (Axenov et al. 2006). What distinguishes
the book from other contributions, however, is its unique focus on urbanism
observed at the ground level as a means of telling the story of post-socialist
cultural privatism. Because of its insights into post-socialist cultural change
and post-modern urbanization, the book is intended for a wide audience
of scholars in urban sociology, urban history, urban geography, cultural
anthropology, urban planning, architecture and art history, as well as scholars
who specialize in the study of Eastern Europe and the post-socialist world.
Furthermore, as Ghodsee and Henry (2010) recently observed, in light of
the intense debate about the proper role of the public sector in the economy
and society that has spread in today's recession-struck Western societies,
udies of East European-style privatizations may present an informative (and
cautionary) tale for policy-makers, not only in post-socialist contexts, but in
Western contexts as well.

The book takes an explicitly cultural approach without attempting to
downplay the significance of political or economic forces as space-makers.
As Eade and Mele point out, the task of “understanding the city” is not to
establish a hierarchy of the three main factors that shape urban form (the
social, the economic and the cultural), but rather to problematize their con-
nections in particular cities and particular periods and continuously strive to
develop ways to comprehend their intersections (2003: 3–4). Indeed, all of
the aspects of spatial change discussed in the book, like all non-spatial social
practices, can be viewed through an alternative, non-cultural lens. However,
I have chosen to focus on culture, because it has remained surprisingly
understudied as a causal factor in post-socialist urbanism. As I mention in
Chapter 2, among the many books on the subject just a handful highlight
culture. In ignoring it, scholars are neglecting a powerful variable that is not
only shaped by the economic and institutional contexts but intersects with
them and shapes them in return, a variable that affects space both directly
(through people's views and ideals of space) and indirectly (by influencing
economic and institutional behavior). Take, for example, the intense sub-
urbanization process after 1989. The new spatial phenomenon is clearly
influenced by the economic and institutional logic of post-socialism, as I reit-
erate in Chapter 6. The green and agricultural land that once surrounded
the compact city was privatized, the regulations constraining the type of
construction allowed at the urban edge were lifted, and building on the
greenbelts became a profitable activity for the burgeoning private sector.
The fact that construction intensified after economic stabilization around
the year 2000, when the economy began to recover, affirms the link between
economic growth and the pace of suburbanization in post-socialist cities, as
others have shown (Timár and Váradi 2001). Still, can it all be explained
without culture? Without it, how can we account for the views of many
new suburban residents who express their intense desire to get out of Sofia
and fulfill their dream of claiming their own space (i.e., suburban, private space) – the type of space they say they craved yet could not attain in socialist housing? How can we explain the proliferation of media and scholarly articles touting the virtues of the old (pre-socialist) Bulgarian family home? And how can we explain the facts that Sofia’s new plans have portrayed suburbanization as a progressive, Western-style trend, and that Sofia’s Mayor goes around proudly cutting ribbons at the opening ceremonies of new gated suburban communities? Aren’t suburbs more than the spatial outcome of economic and political forces; aren’t they also an ideal?

Because the study takes a cultural approach, the main method of investigation is qualitative and the main source of data is the semi-structured in-depth interview. I have conducted nearly one hundred formal and informal in-depth interviews over several months-long trips to Sofia. Of these interviews, thirty-six were conducted with “experts”: actors who have actively participated in or influenced the production of urban forms in recent years or actors who have special knowledge of it. The remainder of the interviews targeted residents and users of the new spaces of Sofia, especially in gated and suburban environments. In Chapters 6 and 7, I rely partially on quantitative data obtained from a standardized survey of a random sample of residents in the affluent southern outskirts of the city (this survey was conducted by the Institute of Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences). Subjects for follow-up, in-depth interviews were selected from the survey respondents. For Chapter 8, I interviewed a selection of residents of six new gated communities. In the interviews, residents were invited to share their views on the city (including its public spaces), their neighborhoods, their neighbors and their homes. Subjects responded to specific questions about where and how they lived before the end of socialism (assuming they were old enough to recall), how their lives and residential environment changed after 1989, how the city and their views of the city have changed since then, and what their ideal residential environment would be. They were also asked about their views of public institutions and their views of their neighbors and people generally, as well as about their willingness to engage in voluntary civic activities. The overall goal of the interviews was to “measure” in qualitative terms people's ideals and preferences when it comes to common (urban) and residential (private) spaces, as well as their views on the state of the civic realm in Bulgaria. Whenever possible, I have used existing nationwide surveys on cultural preferences as well (especially in Chapter 2). Additional information on both ideals and preferences and on the restructuring of urban forms came from a review of the local academic literature, policy documents (e.g., master plans), newspapers, magazines, architectural journals and archives, and advertising materials. Because examining changes in the balance between the city's public and private spaces is a primary purpose of the study, I obtained information on
the topic from a variety of additional pertinent sources, including municipal statistical and mapping data and data created and maintained by some professional, academic and non-profit organizations. Finally, since some of the discussion (e.g., on architectural styles) required visual illustration, I conducted an extensive photographic survey.  

**Book Structure**

I have selected what I believe are some of the most prominent aspects of privatization of space in post-socialist Sofia, including the outright loss of public spaces (e.g., public greenery) and the construction of explicitly private spaces. The latter I understand broadly to include: far-flung wealthy suburban areas that are generally inaccessible to the larger public; gated homes, compounds and even business parks; and structures like malls and hypermarkets that for architectural and/or financial reasons can be considered partially closed off to large segments of the population. Other examples of spatial privatization include various glitzy buildings and ensembles, which often usurp public space without public planning approval and, in their functional organization and architectural style, show little connection to their surroundings. I present a typology of privatizations (which I term *spatial secessions*) later in the book.

The book has ten chapters. Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 makes a case for a cultural interpretation of post-socialist spatiality, specifically for linking post-socialist privatism and post-socialist urbanism. I define two concepts which play a key role in my analysis, the concepts of the public and the private, in their social and spatial connotations. I discuss how views of the public and the private differ in capitalist, socialist and post-socialist settings. I outline the relationship between the public realm and public space, and the private realm and private space, and introduce my main thesis that new urban spaces in post-socialist cities like Sofia both reflect and reinforce privatism as a cultural condition. In this chapter, I also discuss data on current cultural values in Bulgaria obtained from national and international studies. In Chapter 3, I review the basic differences between capitalist and socialist urbanism, and discuss the rich literature on the impact of the post-socialist transition on urban form. As I have already noted, much of this literature has focused on economic and political transformations as leading forces of urban change. Whereas I do not disagree with this approach, I add a complementary interpretation that stresses the importance of culture as an explanatory factor. I also outline the key spatial manifestations of privatism in the post-socialist city: these are the *spatial secessions* mentioned earlier. In Chapter 4, I present a thesis complementary to the one in the previous chapter. I engage with theories of modern
and post-modern urbanization in a global context and argue that rather than being interpreted as unique phenomena, the socialist and post-socialist cities may be analyzed as variants of modern and post-modern urbanism. Post-modernism makes sense here because in many ways the demise of socialism can be interpreted as the demise of Western modernity, and the post-socialist city exhibits a number of spatial features that can be deemed archetypically post-modern. The decline of monolithic public spaces and their substitution with a mosaic of fragmented private spaces may be the most prominent of these features. Thus, I argue that if one is to investigate post-modern urbanism, few places are as good as post-socialist Eastern Europe.

In the remaining chapters, I focus on the case study. In Chapter 5, I present a brief history of Sofia, with an emphasis on the central elements of its urbanity during socialism, and discuss the new, post-socialist spatial phenomena mostly as outcomes of economic and institutional change. I show how Sofia fit into the classic model of the socialist city as conceptualized by French and Hamilton (1979) and others. I further show how the elements of socialist urban spatial structure gradually disintegrated after 1989 as a consequence of the processes of privatization and restitution of state resources: urban land, real estate and means of production. For example, I show how the city lost its once compact form and clear edge as the green fields and farmland that surrounded it during socialism were privatized. I discuss the intense process of commercialization in downtown Sofia, where residential and civic uses sharply declined. I review the shifting scale of residential buildings following state withdrawal from housing production. I also address the massive losses in parkland and other green spaces, which I already mentioned and which followed from the privatization of land and the weakening of planning regulation.

In Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9, I present the bulk of evidence showing how people's views of their lives and their city, during and after socialism, are shaping the new spaces of Sofia (i.e., I make the case for privatism's influence on urban form). In the first three of these chapters, I take an in-depth look at the city's southern periphery, which has become the preferred residential location of the *nouveau riche*. The area includes some modest old villages which were developed further during socialism mostly with small summer cottages in the style of the Russian *dacha*. The influx of new residents leaving central Sofia after 1989 has transformed the social profile of the area, making it a place of stark contrasts, a place where post-socialist wealth and post-socialist poverty reside side by side, yet hardly intersect (for example, new residences are typically designed so that their owners do not have to set foot on a public street). My focus on these suburbs is premised on two observations. First, I believe they represent the landmark contribution of post-socialism to the city, much as the standardized housing districts from
the 1960s and 1970s embody the essential socialist legacy of city-building; and second, their physical features – private streets framed by large single-family homes surrounded by two-meter-tall iron, stone or brick walls – make them the perfect spatial manifestation of post-socialist privatism.

Specifically, Chapter 6 first reviews the economic and legal forces that enabled the growth of post-socialist suburbia (I refer to suburbia as the “ninth ring” since, ostensibly, the socialist city comprised eight rings) and then focuses on the impact of cultural factors. The chapter also discusses the extent to which the suburbanization of Sofia is reminiscent of suburbanization in Western cities – a process Lewis Mumford once called the “collective effort to live a private life” (1938: 43). It further suggests some gender implications of the process. In Western settings, the suburban dream of quaint single-family living in green settings arose historically in part from a renegotiation of gender roles (that is, women became more removed from the city and assumed the role of guardians of domestic life; see, e.g., Fishman 1987). I explore how the gender underpinnings of suburbanization play out in the post-socialist context – in the context of societies in which women participated in the workforce at very high rates, in part because the public realm provided strong support systems such as child care and maternity benefits. I argue that to understand the appeal of post-socialist suburban living (and the seeming willingness with which some women accept the role of a suburban homemaker today), one must take into account the extent to which the private home was perceived as a refuge from the state during socialism. Furthermore, I point to the powerful renegotiation of the border between public and private roles which occurred after 1989. Specifically, what was once normally viewed as a public responsibility (e.g., child care, good child education) is now a private, family responsibility, and it is the women who have typically assumed that obligation (Hirt 2008b).

In Chapters 7 and 8, I explore the new suburban gated and heavily guarded residences, many of which are largely hidden from the public eye. I re-use the book title Iron Curtains as chapter titles because I believe these residences are the most paradigmatic manifestation of post-socialist privatism in the built environment. Chapter 7 examines residences that are individually walled from the street – the type that was more common during the 1990s. Chapter 8 discusses the large gated communities that have proliferated during the last five or ten years. I argue that the shift from individually gated homes to gated compounds reflects some economic realities: during the 1990s, the private real estate industry was so fragmented that it was not able to construct and market large-scale residential developments; this situation has recently changed, especially after the entry of foreign capital and foreign construction firms. However, the shift has also some cultural underpinnings. The 1990s seem to have been marked by some sort of “rugged individualism” and wealthy families tended to wall off individually.
During the second decade of the transition, however, many began to search for gated compounds where they could share space with people of a similar socio-economic status. I disagree with much of the literature on gated complexes, which claims that they represent an export of an American ideal and American development form to other parts of the world. On the contrary, I emphasize the extent to which gating in Sofia, especially during the 1990s, was a locally grounded phenomenon which not only reflects the vigor of the post-socialist culture of privatism but may even represent a return to pre-twentieth-century local building traditions – traditions of erecting gated family compounds, which were common during the difficult times when the Balkans were part of the Ottoman Empire.

In Chapter 9, I return to a city-wide focus. I take a journey through the new suburbs, but also through other parts of the city that have substantially changed since 1989 in order to tell the story of a brave new architecture. One could legitimately argue that this architecture, with its vibrant colors and diverse forms, is an improvement over the monotony imposed by the particularly severe version of modernism so beloved by socialist authorities in the 1960s and 1970s. Still, I argue that the new eclecticism, which includes various peculiar interpretations of the neo-Gothic and the neo-classical (I refer to the latter as Mafia Baroque, Hirt 2008b), leaves the old city scarred and injured, just as modernism did. I also identify several other architectural styles and discuss the general tendency of buildings and building ensembles to act as “islands” rather than as parts of a whole.

In the last chapter, I make a concluding argument for the significance of privatism as a cultural condition in understanding wall-making – in all its reincarnations – in today's Sofia. Finally, I reflect on the possibilities of reviving public space and rejuvenating the public realm in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1 Culture is of course a very complex term. Anthropologists have rightly argued (e.g., Humphrey 2002) that it is misleading to talk of culture in the singular: there is no single, monolithic national culture, let alone a single supra-national post-socialist culture, be it a culture of privatism or something else. My working definition of culture is a “mass belief system” (e.g., Inglehart 1997): a set of widely shared attitudes, norms and patterns of behavior in a given society at a point in time. As I hope to show in this book, attitudes and patterns of behaviors centered on deep skepticism toward the idea of the public realm are widespread in post-socialist Bulgaria; they have, I argue, affected the spaces of its capital city. Although similar skepticism has been attributed to contemporary capitalist cultures at large (I make this case in Chapter 2), I believe it has taken a much more radical form in post-socialist conditions.
These social practices can be explained in both political-economic and cultural terms. Let us take corruption. There is certainly a political economy to it. It may be seen as “rational behavior” which spreads under certain structural conditions: relatively poor societies with murky legal environments where underpaid public officials look for additional sources of income and private firms look for ways to make a profit by sidestepping laws, avoiding taxes, or gaining access to state resources and contracts (Rose-Ackerman 1996). Still, corruption takes people, both those directly involved in the act and those who tolerate them, at least to an extent, in society at large. Thus, it is partially a cultural phenomenon. As partial proof one can take “bribe games” experiments, in which researchers have found that if the same bribes and incentives are offered to people from a sampling of different countries, game participants coming from countries with high levels of corruption are less likely to view corruption as morally wrong and are more likely to engage in corrupt acts during the game. Findings like this suggest that corruption is linked to “social norms and preferences that have been internalized by the inhabitants of those [the highly corrupt] countries” (Barr and Serra 2006).

Like other in-depth case studies, the book strives to illustrate the critical relationship between the “theory and the case study, rather than between the case study and [some] universal population” (Syrett 1995, cited in Scott, J. W. 2009). It also strives to serve as a much-needed bridge between theory and real-life experience (Silverman 1993; Yin 1984).

The term “post-socialist city” is controversial. First, it presumes a “socialist city” and second, it raises the question of whether this “new” type of city is a stable construct distinguishable from the capitalist city. I have used the term for convenience throughout the book without siding with a particular theory. This subject is discussed in Chapter 3.

These experts were selected using the reputational method. They included architects, builders, urban planners and other urban policy-makers, members of the City Council, heads of municipal offices (e.g., one of Sofia’s post-socialist mayors, the current and former Chief Architect of Sofia, the current and former head of the National Center for Housing Policy and Territorial Development), academicians (geographers, sociologists, cultural anthropologists, urban and architectural historians and theorists), heads of environmental and historic preservation non-profit groups, and real estate developers, agents and consultants. The purpose of these interviews was to elicit information on the most prominent processes of post-socialist urban and architectural restructuring, and their causes and consequences (as well as the personal views of the experts on these changes). The focus was on obtaining information regarding the processes that have to do with spatial privatization. Architects, builders and planners were also asked to explain the policy and regulatory environment in which planning and building processes occur in post-socialist Sofia.

More details on the survey methodology and the selection of subjects for further interviewing are included in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. All in-depth interviews were conducted in Bulgarian, translated into English, transcribed, and coded for common themes.
They were specifically asked about trust in government, trust in their neighbors, and trust in people generally, since trust is a basic building block of vibrant civic societies (see, e.g., Putnam 1993).

As in all research, especially interpretive research, I cannot claim that what I found was fully independent of how I found it (Emerson et al. 1995). My subjective bias is inevitably part of the story and, in some cases (e.g., in the chapter on architectural styles), may even be the story. At the same time, I have consistently striven to ensure the study’s reliability and validity by using routine case-study techniques such as collecting multiple sources of evidence for data triangulation purposes (Yin 1984).

I have used the term “cultural values” here because it is commonly used by the surveys discussed in Chapter 2 (e.g., the World Values Survey). Some scholars, however, have argued that the term is problematic since it implies stability in the ends toward which people aspire. Swidler (1986), for instance, asserts that cultures are not made of values (understood as static ends toward which action is oriented) but rather people’s repertoires for action (e.g., their habits, skills and styles of behavior that help them achieve desirable ends).