The restructuring of Bulgarian towns at the end of the nineteenth century

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Abstract. The paper explores the morphological transformations of Bulgarian towns at the end of the nineteenth century. These transformations occurred as a result of massive restructuring of existing towns through the implementation of new modernist principles of town planning popularized during that period. Informal rules that governed development patterns for centuries based on continuing cultural and building traditions were abruptly replaced by rational ideas about a new spatial order imposed by a centralized authority. Features specific to the Balkan region and those occurring more widely are noted. Variations between the plans are investigated in terms of their response to the realities and unique characteristics of existing Bulgarian towns subjected to large-scale redevelopment. A range of planning approaches employed at the time is outlined. While some plans ruthlessly imposed a new spatial order, others attempted to integrate the existing fabric into the new spatial framework advanced by the plans. The paper explores further the rationale shaping these various responses. A comparison is made between the plans as a manifestation of idealistic design principles and the extent of their implementation within a turbulent period of dramatic economic and political transformation.

Key Words: Bulgaria, planning, Sofia, redevelopment

Urban settlements in the Balkan region have a long and rich history which spans more than two millennia of extensive and diverse city building practices. Urbanization processes in this part of Europe have been characterized by dramatic historical events resulting in a succession of broad political, economic and social transformations which have left an indelible mark on the urban structure and fabric of the settlements. While the history of urban evolution in Western European countries has been extensively studied, literature on patterns and processes of urban development in Eastern Europe, and particularly in the Balkan region after the period of antiquity, has been rather limited (Staddon and Molloy, 2000). Yet the analysis of the urban evolution of cities in south-eastern Europe is a fascinating topic of research. Due to historical circumstances, the various periods of urban form transformation
in the region are rather condensed in time and well articulated. Within a little over a century, for example, Bulgaria has made several successive sweeping social transitions: from a feudal colony of the Ottoman empire to an independent nation rebuilding itself as a capitalist society; to the imposition of a communist regime; and, recently, towards the restructuring of its political and economic system as a re-emerging democratic state.

This paper explores the morphological transformations of Bulgarian towns at the end of the nineteenth century. Within a period of several decades after its liberation, the newly-established Bulgarian state embarked on a massive programme intended to radically transform its urban environment. The large-scale restructuring of the existing towns was guided by a desire to break away from the past as a colony of the Ottoman Empire and reconnect Bulgaria with the cultural traditions of Europe by introducing new modernist principles of town planning. In the 30-year period between 1878 (the year of liberation) and 1912 (the year after which Bulgaria became involved in three consecutive and devastating wars), 105 town plans were developed, adopted and implemented to varying degrees of completion (Ganchev and Doychinov, 2001). Prior to this period of restructuring, Bulgarian towns were characterized by what could be considered a typical medieval fabric. This paper describes the nature of the morphological transformations which took place during this 30-year period. The city of Sofia is used as a main case study and is complemented by examples from other Bulgarian cities. Commonalities with other processes of restructuring of European towns during the second half of the nineteenth century are explored within this historical context, highlighting differences specific to the Balkan region. Further variations between the plans are investigated in terms of their response to the realities and the unique characteristics of existing Bulgarian towns subjected to large-scale redevelopment. The paper outlines a range of planning approaches employed at the time. While some plans ruthlessly impose a new spatial order, others show an attempt to integrate the existing fabric into the new spatial framework advanced by the plans. The paper explores further the rationale shaping these various responses. A comparison is made between the plans as a manifestation of idealistic design principles and the manner and intent of their implementation within a turbulent period of dramatic economic and political transformation.

Urban form during the Ottoman period

The urban form of Bulgarian settlements is a product of complex overlaying of cultural traditions and city building practices of several civilizations. By the time the Ottoman Empire took control over the Balkan region in the late-fourteenth century, settlement patterns in the territory of Bulgaria had been established and transformed for almost 2000 years by the Thracian, Greek, Roman, Early Bulgarian, and Byzantine civilizations. Each one of these cultures set up an urban system by building new towns and redeveloping existing ones, connecting them with a road network and erecting monuments, some of which have outlived their civilizations. By various degrees, the material and cultural legacy of these civilizations has been continued in the elements of the built environment, which have been preserved and adapted over the centuries of urban evolution. The city of Sofia, the modern capital of the Bulgarian state, exemplifies the long and winding path of urban evolution in the Balkan region.

The earliest traces of human occupation on the site of the city of Sofia date from the Neolithic Period (Gutkind, 1964). A major factor in the establishment of the first settlement in the area was the presence of a mineral spring. During the eighth century BC, the site was fortified and occupied by the Serdi, a Thracian tribe who developed a town around the spring located in the heart of what is now Sofia’s central business district (Staddon and Mollov, 2000). References to the town have been found in Greek inscriptions but, unfortunately, the limited amount of archaeological excavation does not allow a reconstruction of the settlement’s layout. During the first century AD, the Romans destroyed the town and built a new settlement on the same site, following the strict principles of Roman city planning. The
town, called Ulpia Serdica by the Romans, was laid out in an orthogonal grid pattern surrounded by a rectangular wall. The two main streets (cardo and decumanus) followed the cardinal directions and intersected at right angles, marking the centre of the town. Archaeological finds suggest that most of the public buildings, including temples, basilicas, baths, and warehouses were confined within the city walls. Most of the residential structures appear to have been spread around in the Plain of Sofia, reaching the foothills of the surrounding mountains. Owing to its strategic location along a major route connecting Rome with the eastern provinces and the presence of the thermal spring, Serdica was designated as a provincial capital achieving a high rank in the hierarchy of the Roman urban system. During a period of several centuries following the fall of Rome, the city became an outpost of the Byzantine Empire, continuing its existence as an important military and administrative centre.

In the eighth century, Serdica fell into the hands of the new Bulgarian kingdom which occupied permanently the northern territories of the Balkan peninsula. The Bulgarians rebuilt Serdica as an important commercial and strategic centre, a status which was reflected in its new name Sredets ('centre' in Old Slav). The Roman temples built on the sites of pagan shrines were replaced in turn by churches as the Bulgarian state officially adopted Christianity during the ninth century. In the following centuries until the Turkish occupation, the city changed hands twice more between Byzantium and Bulgaria. When the town was recaptured at the end of the twelfth century by the Bulgarians, it was renamed Sofia. The form of the original Roman settlement was gradually moulded over the centuries and the city took on a medieval character as the rigid grid system was softened by the realignment of properties and the reconstruction of various building sites (Tashev, 1972). Guilds of craftsmen and artisans were formed and dominated certain areas of the urban fabric. Yet, in its overall layout, the city followed the Roman imprint, preserving the geometry of the street system and the location of most of the main public buildings and monuments (Gutkind, 1964).

At the end of the fourteenth century, after a long siege, Sofia fell into the hands of the Turks, and thus began a period of Ottoman occupation of the Balkan region which lasted for five centuries. This period had a profound effect on the restructuring of the existing urban form. One of the first acts of this process of reshaping the urban landscape, which took place during the fifteenth century, was the demolition of the defensive walls of many Bulgarian towns carried out as a strict Ottoman policy intended to weaken organized resistance (Gavrilova, 1999). The demolition of the walls removed the constraint on urban form within the confines of a rectilinear enclosure, thus allowing the urban fabric to evolve according to a more organic pattern. Subsequently, this allowed settlements to be developed at lower densities with relatively spacious parcels including gardens and farmyards, a fact noted by many foreign travellers during the eighteenth century (Gavrilova, 1999). Such a pattern was related to the lifestyle of town residents, the majority of whom were engaged in agricultural activities. The evolution of the urban fabric without a limitation on town growth also facilitated the formation of separate well-defined and relatively isolated residential districts called mahala (Avramov, 1987). Each one of these quarters was settled by a particular ethnic group, with Jewish and Armenian mahalas located close to the centre, the Bulgarian neighbourhoods located at the periphery and the Turkish quarters comprising the rest of the residential fabric (Gutkind, 1964).

In the course of the centuries, Bulgarian towns gradually changed their form, taking on many of the characteristics of the traditional Islamic city. The street network was moulded into an irregular street pattern of narrow and winding streets following the topography and the course of streams, which served as a natural open sewer system (Tashev, 1972; 1973). A few ancient streets preserved their direction but were reduced in width and deformed. Most of these incremental transformations reflected the lack of control over urban development. The Ottoman government maintained a limited involvement in shaping the form of Balkan cities. This was expressed primarily in the construction of roads and major administrative
and religious buildings (Avramov, 1987). In addition to the lack of centralized control, at the local level Balkan towns under Ottoman rule lacked the political autonomy and urban institutions (Yerolympos, 1996) established in the Western European cities during medieval times. Thus urban development and design were shaped as collective anonymous work, governed at the neighbourhood level by the rules of tightly-knit social communities (Donchev, 2000).

In addition to the transformation of street layouts, the dichotomy between private and public life imposed by Islamic law established a strict separation between these two realms. The irregularity of street layouts, the abundance of small alleys and culs-de-sac, and the relative isolation of the mahalas reflected these new imperatives introduced by the cultural values of the Muslim population and the general urban policy of the Ottoman Empire, which imposed severe restrictions on what the Bulgarian population could build¹ (Tashev, 1972). The separation between public and private space was also enforced by high stone walls surrounding individual residential properties. The houses were pushed to the back of the lots and, in cases in which they were built at the street line, the ground floor had no or minimal openings to the street. A stark contrast also existed between the cleanliness of the private houses and yards and the squalor of the streets, which were covered with dust and litter. To a certain extent, this reflected the alienation of the Bulgarian population from municipal affairs and could be construed as a symbolic revolt against the local government to the extent that such existed. The public realm within the towns under Ottoman rule was constrained primarily within the area in the centre of the city known as çarsi. This district, which was the focal point of economic and social activities, was centred on the main street but also extended into the surrounding fabric. Its physical character was defined by rows of single- or two-storey commercial and artisan shops forming clusters based on guild affiliation. The market place and the major administrative and religious buildings were also located in the çarsi, and other public buildings, such as inns, caravanserais, courthouses and public baths, were found in its vicinity or scattered along the major roads leading to the çarsi.

The early-nineteenth century marks the beginning of a period of Bulgarian national revival. A movement for religious and cultural autonomy, coupled with intensification of cultural and economic relations with countries outside the Ottoman Empire, resulted in the emergence of a Bulgarian urban middle class with a greater influence on urban affairs. Many new Bulgarian schools, churches and public buildings began to appear throughout the urban fabric (Tashev, 1973; Tonev, 1987), reflecting the growing momentum of the movement for national independence. By the 1870s, the guilds, town and village councils, and wealthy groups and individuals, founded some 2000 schools in Bulgaria, each providing free education (Gavrilova, 1999) and fostering a strong sense of cultural identity. Starting in the middle of the century, the Ottoman government introduced several reforms in an attempt to curb the growing discontent and to modernize its aging empire, allowing greater autonomy for provincial and municipal governments (Yerolympos, 1996). Influenced to a great extent by the ideas for the reconstruction of Paris, in the mid-1860s Midhad Pasha initiated a large-scale rebuilding programme.² In Sofia, streets were widened and paved and street gaslights were introduced. The five major roads dating back to Roman times and connecting Sofia with other cities in the region were realigned and broadened to enter the heart of the city, thus forming a basic radial structure (Tashev, 1972). Many Turkish residents, anticipating the swing of events leading to the liberation of Bulgaria, left the city as new residents from the Bulgarian villages surrounding Sofia moved in.

By the middle of the nineteenth century a sizable number of Bulgarian residents severed their ties with farming. Lots became smaller and living in the centre of town became prestigious as residential uses began to blend with activities in the commercial core. Buildings moved to the street line, opening their façades and forming a continuous spatial frame (Tashev, 1973) as property values rose and densities increased. Yet most of these trans-
formations had a limited impact on the overall urban layout since 'no real alteration of urban structure was possible without profound changes in the social system' (Gavrilova, 1999, p. 137). The economic and social transformations brewing in the Balkans throughout the century ultimately led to the most radical changes of the built environment in the history of the region (Yerolympos, 1996).

Urban restructuring after the liberation

Liberation from Ottoman rule marked the end of a five-century-long political, economic and cultural oppression of the Bulgarian population and removed the constraints imposed by the feudal Ottoman Empire on the transition from a feudal to a capitalist economy. Like many of the other states in the Balkan region that gained their independence in the nineteenth century, the newly-reconstituted Bulgarian state embarked enthusiastically on a programme of large-scale restructuring of Bulgarian towns, adjusting the built environment to the needs of the new social, political and economic order. The urgency with which this task was accomplished within a remarkably short period of time is testimony to the overwhelming desire of the Balkan nations to become integrated politically, socially and culturally with the rest of Europe (Yerolympos, 1996). Foreign investment was secured to upgrade the national infrastructure by building new roads, railroad lines, ports, banks and factories. Experts from Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, France, Poland and Czechoslovakia were employed to provide much-needed technical assistance on these projects (Yerolympos, 1996, 2003; Tashev, 1973). What was remarkable in the case of Bulgaria, compared to other Balkan states, was the extremely compressed time within which the replanning of cities took place. During the first two decades after liberation, every major Bulgarian town was replanned and most of these plans were subsequently implemented.

Between 1878 and 1885, 36 new city plans were adopted (Ganchev and Doychinov, 2001). This frenetic pace of planning continued into the beginning of the twentieth century. With 80 new plans developed by 1912 (Tonev, 1987), practically all of the Bulgarian cities had been redesigned. The first stage of this process was carried out by Russian military engineers and technicians who prepared numerous cadastral surveys documenting the physical patterns of streets, buildings and land ownership (Tashev, 1973; Gutkind, 1964). The first town plan was completed in 1878 for Stara Zagora, a city devastated the previous year by a fire set by the Turkish army. The plan, designed by the Czech architectural technician Lubor Beyer, was noteworthy not only because it was the first in a series of many new town plans advanced in the following years but also because it completely ignored the existing street system documented in the cadastral plan prepared by Russian engineers (Figure 1) (Avramov, 1987).

The lack of a normative base during the first stage of the restructuring of Bulgarian towns allowed considerable freedom in the development of the new town plans. In the absence of legal regulations guiding their design, the plans derived their inspiration from urban planning ideas and models that were established in Western Europe and the United States as dominant design principles towards the end of the nineteenth century. Three basic models became most influential in the replanning of the Bulgarian cities at that time: the restructuring of Paris under Hausmann, the Ringstrasse scheme carried out in Vienna, and the American model utilizing the gridiron plan extensively (Ganchev and Doychinov, 2001; Jeleva-Martins, 1991). Beyer’s plan for Stara Zagora, clearly inspired by the American model, imposed a rigid orthogonal grid of unified blocks measuring 55 by 120 m delineated by a standardized street system of 25, 16 and 10 m widths. This grid extended well outside the areas devastated by the fire. Separate zones within the plan were designated for civic institutions and a market place. Some of the principles of Beyer’s approach – the use of the grid, the standardization of streets, the designation of different functional zones – were later replicated in other plans, but with more sensitivity and respect towards existing urban patterns.

The city of Sofia was among the first municipalities to acquire and implement a new plan for its restructuring. This task became a polit-
individual imperative when Sofia was designated as the capital of the Bulgarian state in 1878. This decision was dictated primarily by strategic concerns. With only 18,000 residents at the end of the war (Gutkind, 1964), Sofia was neither the most populous city in Bulgaria nor the most prominent political centre in its history. Yet its location placed it at the confluence of the three major regions settled predominantly by Bulgarian population, two of which—Thrace and Macedonia—still remained under Turkish rule according to the treaty of Berlin signed in 1878. The designation of Sofia as capital of the new Bulgarian state was a political act reflecting clearly the intention of the Bulgarian government to reunite its territory.

The new plan for Sofia was prepared by the engineers Amadier and Roubal in 1879 (Avramov, 1987) and hastily adopted by the city council in 1880 (Jeleva-Martins, 1999). The intention of the plan was to reorganize the urban fabric of the city by introducing a high degree of order and a pronounced monumentality in its layout, reflective of the city’s newly-acquired status as a national capital and reminiscent of its rich historical past. The design was based on a radial scheme derived from the geometry of the five ancient roads connecting the city with its region. These major axes converged at the location of the church Sveta Nedelia, marking the definitive centre of the capital and coinciding with the heart of the old Roman town. A ring road encircled the districts formed by the radial axes. Each of the districts was subdivided by an orthogonal grid system that was, to some extent, influenced in its orientation by the existing pattern of streets. The plan was promoted by public officials and newspaper articles as a new vision for the future of Sofia. The aim was to reshape the underlying structure of the city in what was referred to by the public as the ‘American manner’, introducing straight streets and uniformity in Sofia’s urban pattern. Unlike Beyer’s plan for Stara Zagora, however, the design by Amadier and Roubal displayed a much greater recognition of the historically-formed urban structure (Figure 2).

Several important elements of Sofia’s existing urban fabric were used as departing points influencing the design of the new plan. The most general was the preservation of the overall radial layout formed over the centuries.
after the city outgrew the confines of the Roman walls. The plan reinforces the role of the major radial roads as principal structural components while, at the same time, it re-establishes the primacy of the two principal Roman streets — the *cardo* and the *decumanus*. These two axes and particularly the *cardo*, running from the southern edge of Sofia through its core straight to the north, have never been completely erased from the physical imprint of the city. The plan by Amadier and Roubal recovered their role as the most fundamental elements in the structure of the city. The course of the *decumanus* was slightly adjusted, moving it a few blocks to the south, so that the intersection of the two main streets was now centred on the Sveta Nedelia church in a typical Baroque gesture. The plan also preserved the course of several other residential streets which intersected the districts formed by the five major roads. Special care was taken to preserve the location of a number of squares and major public buildings forming nodes within the superimposed grid street structure. The ring road enclosing the city was also based in large part on a pre-existing urban element — a moat dug for defensive purposes during the Russian-Turkish War in 1829 (Tashev, 1972).

The plan was implemented with remarkable speed. After a relatively difficult start during the first years following its adoption, work on the reconstruction of Sofia accelerated after 1885. New district plans were developed to guide the reconstruction of specific areas within the city (Tashev, 1973; Jeleva-Martins, 1991). Between 1888 and 1893, during the administration of D. Petkov as mayor of Sofia, the construction of the new street system was completed without taking into consideration the protests of the affected residents (Tasev, 1972). The frenetic pace of rebuilding was fuelled by a strong desire to eradicate the physical traces of past centuries of Turkish occupation. The city council guided the implementation of the plan with considerable flexibility in view of this political goal as well as the interest of certain influential property owners (Tonev, 1987; Jeleva-Martins, 1999). In the absence of a legal framework governing the implementation of urban renewal, including
the large-scale acquisition of properties and demolition of buildings, corruption scandals broke out. These fuelled a growing public discontent with municipal governance and the ruthless manner with which the plan was implemented (Avramov, 1987; Miteva, 2001). An alternative idea was advanced to develop a new modern city at the edge of the existing one to avoid the high fiscal and social costs of reconstruction. This idea was defeated, however, on the ground that such a layout would create two cities with contrasting environments and populations, causing class barriers that could be detrimental to the development of the young nation.

The rebuilding of Sofia continued following the spirit of the original plan. A monumental order was established through the geometry of the street layout and the imposition of standardized street widths and building heights. Many old squares were rebuilt and new public spaces and parks were inserted into the urban fabric, applying geometrical orthogonal designs which infused the city with a flair of classical monumentality and order. The ideas about the restructuring of Paris and Vienna, which became widely popularized and replicated throughout Europe towards the end of the century, also profoundly influenced the reconstruction of Sofia. Regardless of the references to the principles advanced by Camillo Sitte for a return to picturesque design made in several architectural competitions at the time (Avramov, 1987), Sofia continued to acquire new squares, parks and buildings which added to its new image inspired by a desire for classical monumentality. An interesting parallel could be drawn with similar contemporary urban design ideas in the United States. The City Beautiful movement, which was initiated in an entirely different urban context, suggests that the quest for monumental order and restoration of the beauty and grandeur of the classical city was a prevalent paradigm in the Western world at that time regardless of the specificity of local cultural traditions and city building practices. The quest for monumental order was particularly noticeable in the plans for the newly-established state capitals in the Balkans, such as Athens, Sofia and Belgrade (Yerolympos, 1996). Prominent architects criticized the practice established at the end of the century in Sofia of siting important public buildings on a case-by-case basis. K. Marichkov, for example, called for a unified approach bringing monumentality into the structure of the urban spaces by designating appropriate sites for the location of these significant public structures (Avramov, 1987).

The last two decades of the nineteenth century marked also a time when significant infrastructure improvements were made to facilitate the growth of the new capital. Along with the establishment of a new spatial order imposed by the plan, the construction of a new water system was completed in 1890, electric streetlights were introduced in 1900, and a streetcar transit system set in place in 1901 (Staddon and Mollov, 2000). The fervent and rather chaotic planning activities of the first several years immediately following the liberation pointed to the need to establish a legal and administrative framework for urban planning. In 1881, under the charge of the City Engineer, N. Kropotkin, the first regulations on building construction in Sofia were adopted, and were later applied within the entire country (Avramov, 1987). In the next decade, a series of legislative acts was passed, including the formation in 1893 of a Ministry of Public Buildings, Roads, and Communications, with a separate architectural department for the planning of towns and villages, and the adoption of a national city planning act in 1897 (Whittick, 1974). This first law on town planning and management mandated the preparation of detailed plans for every city by the year 1912 (Tashev, 1973).

This flurry of planning actions was critical for the management of the explosive urban growth that occurred after the liberation. Within a little over three decades, the city of Sofia was radically transformed from a humble medieval town of 18 000 people to a modern metropolis with a population of over 300 000 at the end of the First World War. The old segregated ethnic quarters were replaced by gridded residential districts with mixed populations. Some spatial differentiation in the social pattern occurred, with the majority of the older and more established residents concentrated to the east of the north-south axis formed
by the Vitosha and Maria Louisa boulevards, while many of the new residents settled in the western part of the city. The districts to the west were laid out with a relentless grid lacking the spatial differentiation present in the eastern part of Sofia, where the majority of the historical monuments and new public buildings were located. Many of the people who settled in the working-class western districts were Bulgarian refugees from the territories still occupied by Turkey.

In response to this unprecedented urban growth, the city adopted two updates of Amadier’s original plan, in 1907 and 1910 (Jeleva-Martins, 1991). These plans added new districts generally following the westbound direction of the growth pattern through new grided extensions. Such a pattern of extensions to the city through the addition of new residential districts based on a grid layout was a well-established planning practice in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Morris, 1994). By 1910, a second ring of Sofia was formed to encompass the new districts, thus solidifying the radial-concentric pattern of the urban layout. Unlike the example of the Vienna Ringstrasse, however, none of the ring roads was used as an axis along which important civic buildings would be clustered. The ring roads of Sofia had the character of main thoroughfares along which there was a concentration of some commercial uses and higher-density residential development. Beyond the outer ring, and particularly to the south towards the foothills of the Vitosha Mountain, a number of fashionable suburbs developed in the early-twentieth century (Staddon and Mollov, 2000).

The urbanization rate of Bulgaria in the post-liberation years closely followed the urban growth of the city of Sofia. The first census of 1885, reported that only 15 per cent of the Bulgarian population lived in cities and towns. This number increased dramatically to reach 50 per cent by the end of the Second World War. A notable shift in the urbanization pattern began to occur immediately after the liberation. Whereas during the period of national revival in the mid-nineteenth century most of the urban growth occurred in the small medieval towns located in the folds of the mountains, the course of urbanization shifted after 1878, directed to cities and towns located on major international roads, such as Plovdiv and Pleven, and port towns on the Danube and the Black Sea coast, such as Ruse, Varna and Burgas (Gutkind, 1964). Similar to the restructuring of Sofia, the growth of these booming towns was guided by the plans prepared in the early post-liberation years.

The plan for the reconstruction of Plovdiv, one of the oldest and largest cities in Bulgaria, was developed in the early 1890s. The history of the city closely parallels that of Sofia in its urban evolution, being characterized by the influence of various cultures that occupied its site. The development of a new plan for the city started immediately after the liberation under the leadership of a Russian military engineer, Captain Ilinski. The unification of Bulgaria in 1885 led to the deterioration of the relationship between Bulgaria and Russia. Owing to the change in the political climate, most of the Russian specialists, who were particularly involved in the first years of post-war reconstruction, left the country. Work on the new plan for Plovdiv was interrupted and all of the documentation was lost in a fire which destroyed the municipal archives in 1891 (Avramov, 1987). Signifying the increasingly pro-western European orientation of the Bulgarian government, a new plan was prepared by the Austrian architect Joseph Schnitter and adopted in 1896 (Tonev, 1987). The plan was similar in its approach to that prepared a decade earlier for the city of Sofia, preserving the underlying structure and established historical core of the existing settlement (Figure 3). Compared to the 1879 plan of Sofia, the design for the reconstruction of Plovdiv recognizes to an even greater extent the patterns of the organic urban layout that evolved during the period of Ottoman rule. The majority of the main streets are preserved with minor adjustments for their realignment along stricter geometrical alignments. The street network of the historical core is left almost intact and the pattern of the existing public squares sprinkled throughout the fabric of the old city is used as a basis for the formation of a multi-nodal urban structure. The natural features of the site, including the river Maritsa,
the hills and several other existing open spaces, are masterfully integrated into a new green system. In place of the ring road proposed in the plan of Sofia, a system of four main roads delineates the outer edges of the plan, forming a square within which new gridded urban districts are added. Several zones are designated as concentrations of civic, industrial, residential and recreational uses. This plan proposed a bold vision for the future of the city, anticipating a rapid population growth transforming Plovdiv from a medieval town of 30,000 residents into a metropolis with a population of 200,000.

The higher degree of sensitivity towards existing urban structures displayed in the plan of Plovdiv may be explained by several factors. At the end of the Ottoman occupation, Plovdiv was the largest town in Bulgaria, twice the size of Sofia, and thus had a better established built environment (Avramov, 1987). During the period of the national revival, the Bulgarian population in Plovdiv engaged in a building programme of constructing new churches and schools that considerably surpassed in its scope that of Sofia (Gavrilova, 1999). The city had also a higher proportion of Bulgarian population and, in view of the policy after the liberation of concentrating demolition within areas associated with the Ottoman rule, its urban fabric suffered less damage than that of the city of Sofia in the process of urban renewal. Another factor explaining the higher degree of preservation of the existing urban fabric of Plovdiv is the experience that was gained from the reconstruction of Sofia and the ensuing public opposition to large-scale demolition. The legal framework for planning established by the early 1890s reflected the need to better protect the rights of property owners. The national city planning act of 1897 reflected these sentiments and required that plans should be prepared in a 'realistic', 'most feasible' way, reflecting the existing situation (Avramov, 1987). The law also established a 2-month period for public discussion of the proposed plans and imposed a freeze on all construction within towns not in compliance with its mandates.

During the last decade of the century, urban planning in Bulgaria became more sophisticated in its approach, operating in a political
context that reflected the rise in the influence of public opinion and normative regulations. Evidence of this shift towards more sensitive interventions is exhibited also in the plans of Varna, Ruse, Pazardjik and Vidin developed in the mid-1890s (Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7). In 1879, the Polish engineer Vrazsanowski was invited to prepare a cadastral survey of Varna, the largest Bulgarian port town on the Black Sea. Soon after the completion of this task, he began work on the development of a new plan for the city, but the process was interrupted by political strife leading to a series of rapid changes in local government. Vrazsanowski’s ideas were used later as a basis for the preparation of a new plan completed by the Bulgarian engineer Karakulakov, who took into greater consideration the existing street network as well as the buildings constructed after the liberation (Tonev, 1987). The history of the development of the plan for Varna, which was adopted in 1895, closely resembles the efforts to plan the city of Ruse, another major Bulgarian port situated on the Danube.\textsuperscript{12}

The little documentation that is left of the early plans developed immediately after the liberation\textsuperscript{13} indicates that their authors were primarily concerned with the design of the overall street network and the location of some important public buildings, often imposed without regard for existing settlement form\textsuperscript{14} (Avramov, 1987). The noticeable trend for improved sensitivity to the existing built environment, promoted with the establishment of the legislative framework and the development of urban planning as a profession, could be attributed to a great extent to the stronger reliance on local experts in the replanning of Bulgarian towns towards the turn of the century. During the first years after the liberation, the Bulgarian government relied heavily on foreign experts for the preparation of cadastral and new town plans.\textsuperscript{15} Before the liberation, some of those experts worked in Bulgaria on infrastructure projects and remained in the country thereafter, but most of

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Figure 4. Varna: existing street system of 1878 (left) and plan of 1895 (right). Source: Adapted by V. Donchev from the Municipal Archive, City of Varna.
Figure 5. Ruse: existing street system of 1878 (left) and plan of 1897 (right). Source: Adapted by V. Donchev from the Municipal Archive, City of Ruse.

Figure 6. Pazardjik: existing street system of 1878 (left) and plan of 1896 (right). Source: Adapted by V. Donchev from the Municipal Archive, City of Pazardjik.
them were invited from abroad by the young Bulgarian government. In addition, a number of freelance technicians came to Bulgaria and worked on the preparation of the plans for smaller towns such as Popovo and Omurtag (Tonev, 1987). Many of these specialists hired Bulgarians as assistants. A great number of these soon acquired sufficient technical experience, and were later employed as staff members in municipal governments (Avramov, 1987). The demand for local experts in city building and town planning was recognized early on by the Bulgarian government and fellowships were established for training abroad. Thus, towards the end of the nineteenth century, a considerable portion of planning activities and responsibilities was transferred to Bulgarian experts (Tashev, 1973). The native professionals exhibited a greater sensitivity towards historical and cultural traditions and a greater recognition for the existing built environment compared with the foreign experts hired by the government during the 1880s.

**Conclusions**

The analysis of the plans for Stara Zagora, Sofia, Plovdiv and other major settlements developed in the first decades after the liberation illuminates a period of restructuring of Bulgarian towns heroic in its scope and ambition. The new plans presented a radical departure from the existing patterns of urban settlement and form as the newly-independent Balkan states struggled to rebuild their cities
based on a vision that was the exact opposite of the traditional one (Yerolympos, 2003). The "introverted" layout of towns with organic structure, narrow and winding roads, and compact form was replaced by the "extroverted" designs of large settlements with open grid street networks, monumental buildings and spaces, and a capacity suggested in the plans for unlimited outward expansion. Many of these new ideas were eagerly imported from the west, quite directly and crudely in the beginning, but later with more recognition for the need to adapt them to the local context. The process of regulating urban form became highly centralized as political power shifted from the traditional local communities to the central authority (Jelavich, 1983; Donchev, 2000).

This remarkable process of massive reinvention of the urban fabric of the new Bulgarian state is even more astonishing considering the limited financial and human resources available for the implementation of this programme. The fact that this process was carried out within such a short time under such difficult circumstances could not be explained by urbanization pressures alone. The urban system of Bulgarian towns at the time of liberation was composed of a network of fairly small and stable settlements. The urban renewal programme initiated by the Bulgarian government at the end of the nineteenth century preceded the wave of urban growth and firmly shaped its future patterns. It was a result of the unleashing of the energy of a new nation exhilarated by its regained freedom, resolved to change its historical path and determined to reunite with the rest of Europe.

Notes

1. An ordinance limiting the height of Christian buildings forced Bulgarian builders to resort to some creative approaches, including the construction of churches dug into the ground.
2. This programme was exclusively limited to reconstruction. Only one planned town was built at the beginning of the nineteenth century on the territory of Bulgaria – Orhanie (Botevgrad) (Tashev, 1973).
3. Tashev (1987) puts this figure at 35.
4. Beyer, who worked before the liberation on the construction of the first railway lines, subsequently prepared the plans for Nova Zagora, Kazanlak, Kjustendil and several smaller towns in Bulgaria (Tonev, 1987).
5. The first regulations concerning urban development were introduced and implemented in the early 1880s but did not have the power of law until such legislation was passed in 1897.
6. Amadier, and several municipal technical staff including Michael and Sheks, were also involved in the preparation of the first cadastral survey of Sofia in 1879 (according to Avramov, 1987), as was Roubal (according to Tashev, 1972).
7. The year of the unification of the two parts of Bulgaria separated by the Berlin Treaty of 1878.
8. The City Engineer, Proshek, prepared one of the first area plans for the district around the grain market, and plans for new urban extensions were adopted in 1888, 1889, 1890, 1892, 1895 and 1897 (Tashev, 1972).
9. Yerolympos (1996, 2003) singles out two major goals of the newly emerging states in the Balkan region during the nineteenth century – the desire for "westernization" and 'de-Ottomanization'. These goals generated and shaped major planning activities at the time.
10. The geometry and width of the Parisian boulevards was used as a guide for developing the new street designs (Tashev, 1972).
11. Only 13 000 of the 20 000 residents of Sofia were of Bulgarian ethnicity (Kazasov, 1975), compared to Plovdiv, where Bulgarians comprised the majority of the 30 000 residents.
12. The original plan for Ruse was prepared by Augiere and later developed by several teams of foreign and Bulgarian architects, engineers and technicians.
13. Many of the first plans were destroyed due to frequent changes in the administration, lack of technical knowledge, fires and, sometimes, plain negligence (Avramov, 1987).
14. This approach is reminiscent of Midhad Pasha’s plan for the restructuring of Sofia in the mid-nineteenth century.
15. There were over 100 foreign specialists working in the field of planning in the early 1880s (Tonev, 1987). Many more worked as designers of important civic buildings, squares and monuments, such as Sofia University (Breanson), the State Theatre
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( Helmer and Felner) and the Ministry of Defence (Kolar).

16. A key figure among those was G. Nenov, who received his professional education in Belgium. He was in charge of the development of plans for over 50 towns and hundreds of villages (Avramov, 1987).

References


ISUF at the Thirtieth International Geographical Congress, Glasgow, UK, 18-20 August 2004

The tenth anniversary of the formation of ISUF was the occasion for a two-part conference. The first part was spread over 3 days within the Thirtieth International Geographical Congress in Glasgow, Scotland. The second part extended over 4 days in the form of a Post-Congress Symposium in Urban Morphology in Newcastle upon Tyne (this issue, pp. 107-10). The Glasgow part, held in the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre in a characteristic stretch of the city’s middle fringe belt, comprised 12 sessions within a much larger event attended by some 1850 participants and consisting of up to 23 concurrent sessions. It provided an opportunity for urban morphologists to sample wider geographical fare and for geographers working a little beyond the margins of urban morphology to sample ISUF sessions. To accommodate as many contributions as possible the Congress organizers programmed four presentations within each 80-minute session and scheduled the initial session each day to begin at 7.30 a.m. The unpopularity of the latter was reflected in marked diurnal variations in attendance, and provided the unscheduled bonus,