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Ideological and Cultural Practices in The Soviet Housing Space: The Case of Allocation and Obtaining of Apartments in Yerevan

Harutyun Vermishyan*

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to reveal the ideological and cultural practices underpinning the formation of the housing space in Soviet Yerevan. While exploring the case of Yerevan, this paper provides insight on the processes of allocating and obtaining an apartment in the Soviet period and reveals contradictions of ideological and cultural practices in this context. Qualitative research has been conducted analysing the narratives of personal and group experiences. Through a narrative approach, this paper studies the relationship between the physical and social spaces. In particular, the method of narrative semiotics was implemented. This approach served the purpose of building a narrative model of the processes of allocating and obtaining in the Soviet housing space. In sum, twenty (20) narrative interviews were conducted with Yerevan dwellers. This paper shows that in the context of the Soviet city of Yerevan, there was a distortion of macro-interventions and informal mechanisms for the formation of the Soviet space were institutionalised in the continuum of communism and capitalism. This led to the evolvement of inclusive ideologies on a cognitive level and to the circulation of positioning ideologies on a pragmatic level.

Keywords: Soviet housing, ideology, cultural practices, narrative semiotics, communism, capitalism.

Introduction

Urban history is a quintessential social history, and urban space is an important indicator for diagnosing a society (Tilly, 1996, p. 703; Connolly, 2008, p. 5). Urban space is a combination of public and private places and the macro and micro-practices of the formation of these places that allow for understanding of a given society, its current ideologies, and cultural forms (Lefebvre, 1991; 2003; Hutchison & Teixeira, 2016). In this article, the importance of housing space is accentuated. Housing space is seen as a uniquely complex phenomenon, a composition of both private and public spaces (Foley, 1980; McFarlane, 2011), and living experience (Kalyukin, 2020, pp. 13-16). Studies of the housing space are interdisciplinary, covering human-environment interactions and socio-psychological aspects of space perception (Cook et al., 2012).

The main focus of this article is the process of the formation of the housing space - specifically, the practices of allocating and obtaining apartments - in Soviet Yerevan (capital of Armenia) as a case of a Soviet city. The formation of Yerevan's housing space occurred under socialist ideology. One of the cornerstones of the socialist ideology was the idea that the state guaranteed equal housing to its citizens (Andrusz, 1984, p. 17). As Gentile & Sjöberg (2013, p. 174) argue, "housing was in short supply for the entire duration of the socialist experiment, irrespective of geographical context." At the same time, similar studies (Smith, 1996, pp. 82-83; Szelenyi, 1987, p. 7) showcase the processes that were actually taking place under non-socialist principles and the supposedly present socialist ideologies. Smith (1996, p. 92) referring to Hamilton (1993) mentions, "Thus, contrary to the expectations of socialist ideals, the housing allocation system was found to have a regressive re-distributional impact: a finding confirmed by others elsewhere." Such deviations and contradictions have been widely discussed by modern researchers (Marcinićzak et al., 2013; Gentile & Sjöberg, 2006; 2010; 2013; Salukvadze & Sichinava, 2019; Kalyukin & Kohl, 2020), especially from a macro-political point of view. In this article, using the case study of Yerevan, the processes

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taking place at the micro-level will be presented as a reflection of macro-political practices. In the development of the Soviet housing space, everyday practices illustrating state ideologies were more vivid in the process of allocating and receiving housing. Most of the citizens in urban areas underwent this process, thus accumulating the experience of obtaining a housing space. Hence, emphasising the practice of allocating and obtaining housing in the context of Soviet mass housing processes, the article addresses the following research questions:

- a. How were the everyday practices of allocating and obtaining an apartment performed in the Soviet city?
- b. How did ideology and culture contradict in allocating and obtaining an apartment?

The novelty of this research is attributed to the performed analytical work that applies semiotic theory for conceptualising newly available (post-Soviet) empirical research data. The paper adds to the limited research on Soviet everyday life incorporated into the macro social structure of the housing space. The paper points to the methodological value of utilising semiotic theory for understanding the housing space. A possibility for comparative review and analysis would emerge if the methodological approach was applied to other post-Soviet cities in urban studies, shedding light on the contradictions between ideological and cultural everyday practices in the development of the Soviet housing space and Soviet cities.

Context

Until 1918, Yerevan was the centre of the Erivan Governorate, one of the districts of the Caucasus Viceroyalty of the Russian Empire. It was a small eastern town with 30,000 inhabitants. In May 1918, Yerevan became the capital of the First Republic of Armenia (1918-1920), and since December 1920 Erivan was occupied by the Red Army. Afterwards, for 70 years, Yerevan was the capital of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. In a sense, the urban history of Yerevan began from this year (1920) with the start of modernisation in this Soviet city.

Central to the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic was the development of Yerevan as a capital city. The first master plan of Yerevan for one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants was developed by Tamanyan¹, approved by the Council of People's Commissars of the Armenian SSR in 1924. Already in 1934 Tamanyan was required to create a larger city with a population of five hundred thousand. The last master plan of the socio-economic development of Yerevan in the Soviet period was developed in 1971, the detailed plan of the centre of Yerevan was ready in 1984 (Mamyán, 2020).

The rapid growth of Yerevan's urban space was the result of 20th century USSR urban policy. Parallel to the industrialisation of Yerevan, the central element of the city's development was the development of new residential areas. According to the Ministry of Urban Development, most of the apartment buildings (52%) were built in Yerevan during 1960-80 (Housing resources and public utility of the Republic of Armenia, 2013, pp. 46-50). The increase in construction at this stage was also due to the replacement of the Stalinist constructivism style of the 1950s by Khrushchev-era typical architecture, with a central focus on accelerating construction and implementing more affordable projects. An important event in this regard was the 1955 decision of the Central Committee of the USSR "On elimination of excesses in design and construction"², which dramatically changed the urban development.

Hence, the housing space of Yerevan developed during the Soviet period, mainly after World War II (see table 1), and from 300,000 inhabitants in the 1950s it became a city with one million inhabitants in 1978, settling at the expense of the provincial and rural populations of other regions

¹ Alexander Tamanyan, a famous Armenian architect, designed the first master plan of Yerevan (for 150,000 inhabitants, the People's Council of the Armenian SSR approved it in April 1924). The new plan was one of the first significant developments in Soviet urban planning. It was the basis of all subsequent master plans for Yerevan.

² Resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR of November 4, 1955 No. 1871 "On the elimination of excesses in the design and construction".

of Armenia³. The acceleration of construction rates and the implementation of the “One Million Yerevan” project brought about significant changes in the urban culture (Vermishyan et al., 2015, p. 82). In this sense, the rapid and extensive development of Yerevan’s urban space strongly highlights the potential of semantic controversies within the urban culture, formed as a result of political ideologies and everyday urban practices. As shown in Table 1, the Yerevan housing space had little advancements in post-Soviet times. As a result, the core history of the formation and development of the Yerevan housing space is a Soviet urban history.

Table 1: Number of apartment buildings by dates of commissioning

	Until 1950	1951-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	2001 and onwards
Number of apartment buildings	361	1800	1192	1158	160	83

Source: Housing resources and public utility of the Republic of Armenia (2013, pp. 47-50)

The increase of the Soviet urban population stimulated an increase in construction volumes. Increasing construction was provided not only by the Central Executive Committee but also by the Capital Construction departments of large industrial infrastructures (Andrusz, 1984, p. 53). In Soviet times, authorities heavily dictated the urban development process and the housing construction in particular (Sosnovy, 1959; Borén & Gentile, 2007). As a result, one cannot explore Soviet architecture relying solely on aesthetic ideas or architectural reasoning without paying attention to the authorities and ideologies (Meerovich, 2010). All of the political shifts were immediately represented in the urban spaces. As Gentile & Sjoberg (2013, p. 174) explain, “the fairness and justness of the housing allocation system were continuously put to test by the actions of a political and administrative class intent at managing – or abusing – a situation whereby the drying out of the housing need was out of sight. As a result, housing allocation under socialism was more egalitarian in theory than in practice.” Similar problems were visible in the South Caucasus, particularly in Armenia and the capital Yerevan, due to the Soviet-era construction (Salukvadze & Sichinava, 2019). The paper argues that urban development processes with certain ideological bases are doomed to fail if not accompanied by respective cultural practices. Soviet Yerevan’s living space is one of the most demonstrative cases of a failed attempt to shape a “Socialist space”, therefore a “Soviet society.” Hence, this paper describes the urban development processes during the Soviet times and the issues of interrelation between the political ideologies and cultural practices in the process of urban space development. The knowledge gained from analysing the Yerevan case may well be transferred into an increased understanding of housing processes in the Soviet system more generally.

Theoretical background and methodological approach

Urban space is dynamic, it changes by materialising the actual social and political ideologies (Lefebvre, 1991; Lagopoulos, 2009). Space is created at the expense of unified practices (Tuan, 1997). Urban space is the product of social relationships that simultaneously shape, control, and prioritise thought and action (Lefebvre, 1991). Articulation of ideological and cultural practices occurs here (Clarke, 2015; Kallinen & Häikiö, 2021; Steele & Homolar, 2019), as two important components of social and political processes (Sefa Dei, 1995). An ideological practice is a conscious, discursive dimension of agency (Häikiö, 2010; Zacchi, 2012), and a cultural practice is a process of forming the individual or group dispositions (Rossberger, 2014; Wright, 2002, p. 311). Hence, the goal of the researcher is to reveal the ideological and cultural practices that lie behind the construction of urban space.

Reflecting on the diagnosis of Soviet Yerevan's housing space formation, housing is defined here as:

- The result of actual practices of individuals or groups involved in unique relationships;
- A social process of producing individual or group subjectivity.

It should be noted that in contemporary studies of housing, the latter is defined as *experience* which allows understanding the reflections of complex ideological and power relations on the level of everyday living practices (Borén & Gentile, 2020; Kalyukin, 2020).

The proper methodology of revealing and describing these practices is the narrative inquiry as the main way of understanding experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) and the everyday practices that take place in/through both the personal and/or group experiences. Life experience can be considered as a variable process, characterised by the continuous interaction of people's thinking with their personal, social, and material environments. According to the pragmatic approach, narratives "are the result of a confluence of social influences on a person's inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history. These stories are often treated as the epiphenomenal to social inquiry - reflections of important social realities but not realities themselves" (Dewey, 1976; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41). Relying on such stories allows scholars to study the relationship between physical and social spaces. Life experience consists of an interaction between the "subject" and the "object", the "I" and the "environment," so it is not only physical or only mental (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39).

Narrative inquiry allows to identify the relationships between agency and structure. This is due to the choice of narrative as a unit of analysis, since, for example, narrative surveys tell the stories of people. These stories are the result of human inner life, social influences on their environment, and the unification of their unique personal stories across social environments (Phoenix & Brannen, 2013; Hollway & Jefferson, 2012). On the other hand, narratives are a form of representation that reveal people's life experiences as they occur over time (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, pp. 39-41). It is appropriate to choose the narrative method of collecting information to understand people's life experiences. Another methodological approach is to bring out the reflection on individual and group practices in narratives related to life experiences, which allows for understanding of the ideological influences and cultural manifestations as symptoms of the society in a given period. Developing in the 20th century, influenced by Russian formalists (Propp, 1968) at the end of the 20th century, Greimasian narrative semiotics (Greimas, 1971; 1973) expanded to include sociology and anthropology, cognitive psychology, business-related disciplines, organisational research, public administration, etc. (Gertsen & Sjøderberg, 2011).

Narrative semiotics was used to answer the research questions in this article, building a narrative model of the process of allocation and obtaining of Soviet housing. According to the Greimasian approach, in each story there are three pairs of actant relations, where the actant is the part that has a role in the story, personified or abstract (Greimas, 1971; 1973). These three pairs of actants represent fundamental patterns found in most narratives (Figure 1):

- A subject/object that designates a quest or wishes for something, forming the axis of desire;
- A sender/receiver that stands for a process of transmission or communication, forming the axes of knowledge;
- A helper/opponent that describes support or opposition related to the subject's endeavours, forming the axis of power.

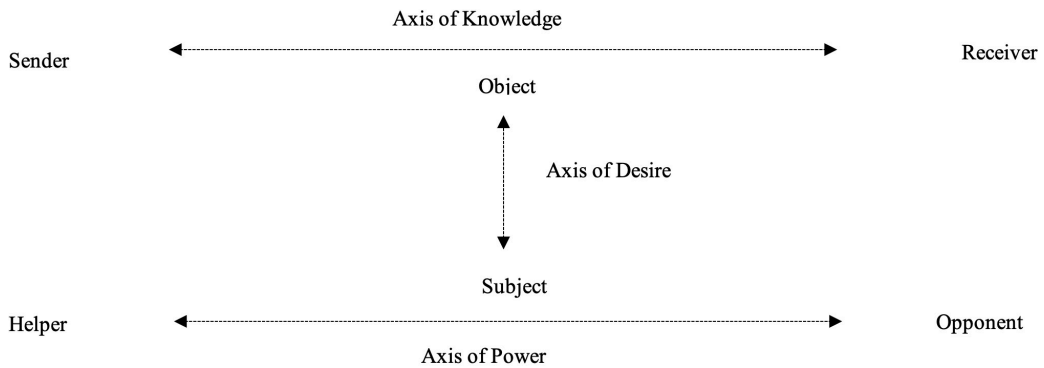


Figure 1: Actantial Model of A. J. Greimas

Source: Eldridge, 2016, p. 147; Gertsen & S oderberg, 2011, pp. 789-790

People, places, objects, or abstract concepts can play the narrative roles of the helper and the opponent. The relationship between the sender and the receiver is mandatory. It is based on the desire to receive an item or an obligation: the sender transfers this desire to the receiver. Thus, the function of the sender is to encourage the receiver to do something, thereby turning him from the receiver into the subject (Greimas, 1973). On the other hand, the relationship between the subject and the object, also based on desire or duty, is associated with a change in the state of being: its function is to transform the situation of lack of desire into a situation of sufficiency by connecting to or disconnecting from the object. Thus, the desire to receive an object becomes a key link in the whole scheme (Greimas, 1973).

The story develops through decision-making points that in turn develop relationships between the subject and other narrative forces. These relationships differ based on what is labelled as tonality and modality in semiotics (Fiol, 1989; Greimas & Rengstorf, 1976). These narrative components characterise the relationship between narrative forces. The tone of the narrative represents a positive or negative direction (the same as helper and opponent circumstances), and modality represents the subject's judgments about the phenomenon and can be cognitive or pragmatic. The cognitive mode confirms the subject's knowledge connection or acquired knowledge. Cognitive relationships take place beyond the reach of action. The pragmatic mode confirms the subject's power connection or ability to act. Practical relations between the subject and other narrative forces take place through actions (Greimas & Rengstorf, 1976).

After revealing the narrative structure, it is necessary to move on to the discovery of the deep structure that takes place through the semiotic square. The dominant value of the system is placed in the upper left corner of the square. The logical relationship of opposition and contradiction governs the positions of the other three values, where (S) is a primary value, the opposition of the former is (S1) and the contradiction is (-S) (Greimas, 1983; Corso, 2014; Eldridge II, 2016) (Figure 2.1). The relationship between the cognitive and pragmatic levels of the text is much more obvious during the study of the deep level.

Based on our research question, considering the Soviet housing process as a socialist, ideological level of communist practice, a semiotic square was built using the field of "communism" as the dominant one, thus opposing it to the "capitalism" pair (Figure 2.2).

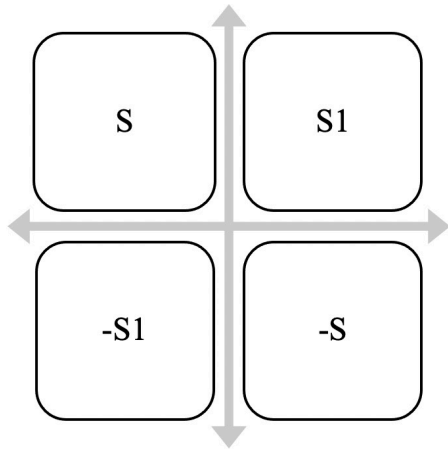


Figure 2.1: Example of a semiotic square
Source: own elaboration

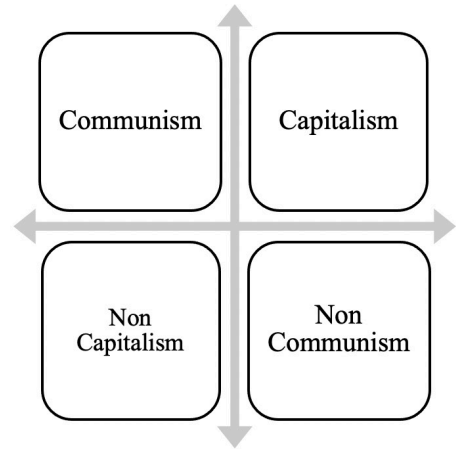


Figure 2.2: Semiotic square: communism vs capitalism

Research methods

Qualitative research was conducted to reveal the ideological and cultural practices of the formation of the Soviet Yerevan housing space. The qualitative research study was conducted using the method of *narrative interviews*. Twenty (20) narrative interviews were conducted with Yerevan dwellers between September-November 2015. Life stories that complement the urban life experience were subjected to the narrative semiotic analysis.

The focus of the narrative interviews was reflected in the discussions of the following topics: the conditions of the building; obtaining and allocating apartments in Soviet times; communication with neighbours, and the building exploitation features. In this article, the procedures of obtaining and allocating an apartment as the core aspect of housing space formation is emphasised. The topics were emerging as stories from individuals to the researcher and co-constructed between the researcher and the interviewee; the interviewees were asked to reflect on descriptions of physical, emotional, and social situations, referring to the specificity of obtaining their apartments in Soviet Yerevan (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 112).

Given that the interviewees reflected on their Soviet experiences of living in the post-Soviet period (they retrospectively constructed their life experiences of more than 50 years), this had some limitations. However, the construction of narratives relied on some objectively defined social facts, trying to design narratives where next to the perceptions of interviewees the isotopy of space and time could also be illustrated. These were not one-step interviews: the narratives were constructed through several meetings with the respondents, on average two to three meetings (with average duration of 3 hours) were organised with each interviewee who was ready to elaborate on the narrative.

The selected cases of the interviewees were represented by residential buildings. Two basic criteria were used for the selection of those residential buildings: the community and the exploitation date of the buildings (Table 2). Considering the statistical data on RA housing resources and public utilities (Housing resources and public utility of the Republic of Armenia, 2013, pp. 47-50), the observed cases were distributed as follows:

Table 2: Exploitation years of the selected buildings

Year of residential building exploitation	1951-1970	1971-1980	1981-1995	Total
Number of cases	7	7	6	20

Source: own elaboration

Next, interviewees from each selected building were identified. The selection criteria for the respondents were as follows:

- Respondents had to be living in the building since the initial exploitation date of the building;
- Respondents had to be at least 18 years old at the time when the building was exploited;
- Respondents had to be very well informed on the exploitation procedure of the building, the changing space of the surrounding areas.

Findings

When depicting the narrative structure of the housing space formation in the context of the formation of the Soviet Yerevan housing industry and the living space of Yerevan, based on the approach of the structural semantics of Greimas, the following appearance occurs (Figure 3).

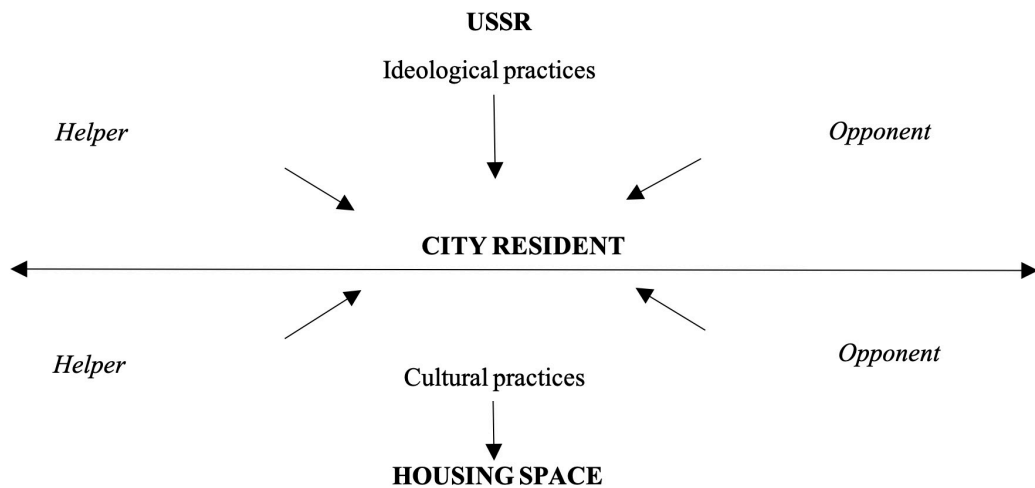


Figure 3: Narrative structure of living space formation in the Soviet Yerevan

Source: own elaboration

The most striking observation is that the main agent of the Soviet housing project, the sender, is the USSR, which aimed to create a “Socialist” living space. Taking into consideration the classical actant relations at the ideological level, the object of the narrative is the living space, and the recipient is the urban dweller. However, at the level of real practices, there is a violation of cognitive and pragmatic relations, when the city dweller becomes a subject of the recipient and targets the living space. If the formation of socialist spaces at the ideological level was realistic in the context of pragmatic socialist practices (where the main subject should have been the socialist state), then the logic is violated when the person who does not share the resettlement socialist ideology (or does not fully carry it) appears in the role of the subject. It should be noted that after World War II, especially after the 1960s, the intensive settlement of the city of Yerevan was carried out at the expense of rural settlements and suburban settlements, which often brought provincial culture, making it dominant, in contrast to socialist culture and/or ideology. The urban development pace

and the intensive resettlement policy were the major challenges for strengthening the ideological foundations of a socialist city in the everyday spatial practices.

In the narratives based on the interview data, it is interesting to analyse the process of allocating and obtaining an apartment⁴, the manifestation of helper and opponent actants (Table 3). Helpful forces can consist of the subject's mind frame, the subject's actions, or the actions of others in the story. By encoding the stories, it becomes clear that in addition to the “work experience” and “procedures” options, which are equivalent to the socialist ideology in the process of obtaining an apartment, the most common circumstances were the “blat” (the so-called “institution of informal networks of loyalty” (Salukvadze & Sichinava, 2019, originally using by Ledeneva (1998)) and “money” options that actually contradicted this ideology.

Table 3: The main helper/opponent actants manifested in the narratives of allocating and obtaining an apartment

Helper	Opponent
1. Blat	1. Procedures
2. Work experience	2. Status/Position
3. Money	3. Money
4. Procedures	

Source: own elaboration

The expressions of “blat” and “status/position” actants in the stories of receiving an apartment were very significant.

*My husband was working at a Yerevan newspaper back then. And the day came that they decided to construct a building for journalists. My husband took an active role in the construction. Then when the construction work was done, the central commission saw that the apartments were too much for the journalists, decided to take the most beautiful apartments for themselves. All good apartments were taken by **representatives of the Central Committee**. (Received the apartment in 1961)*

*We experienced hardship [in obtaining housing], of course we did. When we were listed, I was the cooperative chairman and I was myself preparing documentation. Say the building was ready, but still many random things would happen: someone had **to call “from the above”** [meaning from those in power], they were calling sometimes to say that our houses could be given away to other people in order to make us give bribes. (Received the apartment in 1978) Those who had **position, status, a good network** could live in the city centre. General people had to wait until their turn would come and they had no opportunity to choose their apartment, they were given only a number of limited choices out of which they could choose. (Received the apartment in 1985)*

*To get a good apartment, we activated our **circle of acquaintances** as we initially received an apartment on the first floor next to the garbage storage. (Received the apartment in 1986)*

These contradictions are most clearly emphasised in the semiotic analysis of cognitive and pragmatic or ideological and cultural practices of allocating and obtaining housing in Soviet Yerevan. For this purpose, two purely conflicting ideologies, communism and capitalism, have been coded. The cornerstones of the Communist ideology were the “public”, “equality”, “solidarity”, and in the case of Capitalism, the “private”, “difference”, and “competition” (Smith, 1996, p. 92).

⁴ Housing in the Soviet Armenia and the USSR was one of the most important sectors of the national economy and was based on socialist principles. The distribution of housing carried elements of communist distribution (Salukvadze and Sichinava, 2019; Humphrey, 2005).

The other fields were built according to the principles of complementarity (Communism – Non-Capitalism, Capitalism – Non-Communism) and antagonism (Communism – Non-Communism, Capitalism – Non-Capitalism) (Table 4).

Table 4: Operationalization of ideologies within the semiotic square

<p>Communism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Public</i> • <i>Equality</i> • <i>Solidarity</i> 	<p>Capitalism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Private</i> • <i>Difference</i> • <i>Competition</i>
<p>Non-Capitalism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Non-private</i> • <i>Similarity</i> • <i>Monopoly</i> 	<p>Non-Communism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Non-public</i> • <i>Inequality</i> • <i>Conflict</i>

Source: own elaboration

Based on the proposed scheme, the narratives summarising the Soviet attempts to get an apartment were coded. Table 5 shows the dominance of the communist ideology over the other ideologies in the narrative of allocating and obtaining housing. However, when it comes to actual daily practices, the contradictory and contrary fields of capitalist and non-communist ideologies become apparent.

Table 5: Distribution of semantic codes manifested in the narratives of obtaining an apartment

	Communism	Capitalism	Non-Capitalism	Non-Communism
Cognitive level	32	4	4	2
Pragmatic level	8	14	0	12

Source: own elaboration

Figure 5 presents the semiotic squares with the sematic codes of the specific ideologies. In particular, Figure 5.1 shows the structure that encapsulates the cognitive or ideological layer of the narrative. It allows revealing the beliefs and perceptions of a USSR Yerevan citizen in the process of getting an apartment, where the cognitive relations with the state were manifested. In contrast, figure 5.2 describes cultural practices in the process of allocating and obtaining an apartment, or the life experience of allocating and obtaining an apartment on a pragmatic level.

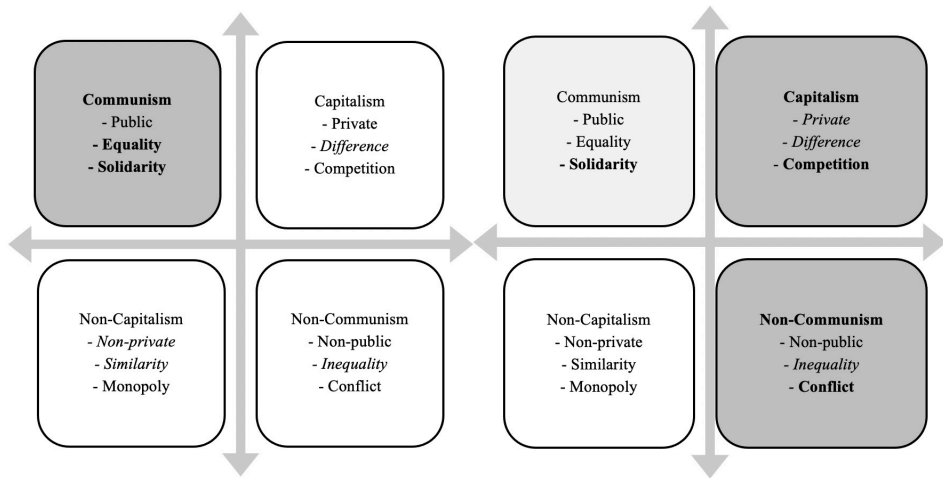


Figure 5.1. Cognitive level

Figure 5.2. Pragmatic level

Figure 5. Distribution of semantic codes in the semiotic square

Source: own elaboration

Coding the results showcases the contradictions in the actant model. In particular, if the code is taken out at the cognitive level, this mostly emphasises the field of communist ideology, especially the values of “equality” and “solidarity” and much less frequently refers to other ideologies (see figure 5.1, the values indicated in italics). Excerpts mentioned in Table 5 best underline the idea that legitimate elements of communist ideology are observed on the cognitive level, exemplified by viewing the state’s allocation of housing as an unbiased and precise procedural practice, unquestioned by the city dwellers. At the same time, when the real societal relationships and the perceptions thereof are described on the same cognitive level instead of ideological dispositions, the Capitalism and Non-Communism codes of difference, privilege, and inequality are clearly highlighted (See Table 6).

Table 6: Quotes from narrative interviews: cognitive aspects of processes of allocating and obtaining apartments in Soviet Yerevan

Cognitive level	
Ideology	Quotes
Communism	<p><i>There was no instance of queueing and not getting an apartment, the queues went so fast that most of the time no attention was paid to that.</i> (Received the apartment in 1965)</p> <p><i>Those who had work experience, had contributed to the workplace, would get an apartment... There were no complications: in the Soviet period, usually there were no complications.</i> (Received the apartment in 1985)</p> <p><i>I was working at the [X] factory... it was a large factory with 1500 employees. In Communist times, everyone was in queue waiting to get a house. I was in queue, too.</i> (Received the apartment in 1991)</p> <p><i>There was a precise list of who would obtain when. When it was their turn, they obtained: say, it was my turn, I would get it, if it wasn't your turn, you wouldn't get it. Even back then someone demanded money from someone to get the apartment earlier, and they were sued for that right in our club and sentenced to seven years.</i> (Received the apartment in 1991)</p>

<p>Capitalism</p>	<p><i>Clearly there was a privileged group, for example, the office director or the head of the personnel department, although back then workers would get paid much more. Directors all had an apartment... One could tell from the apartment if they are rich or not, this person gets furniture from there, another one – from a humbler place... Good buildings were mostly cooperative, and not everyone could register for a cooperative. It's like, buying an apartment but paying little by little, and paying every month little by little. (Received the apartment in 1985)</i></p>
<p>Non-Communism</p>	<p><i>Using networks was happening, why not, like in every sphere, it was happening to some extent. They would tell the first one in queue that they would give [the apartment] at the end of this year or the beginning of the next, it's just that we have to give it to this one, and that was creating more neighbourly relations. (Received the apartment in 1971)</i></p>
<p>Non-Capitalism</p>	<p><i>We owned a private house in this area, in 1971 they came and told us that the state is to create buildings at this place and that our house was getting in the way. Already we knew that what could you do against the state, they had to destroy it, you couldn't get a hold of your ownings. And back then they wouldn't give money, but would give an equivalent apartment. We were given an equivalent three-room apartment in that building built there. (Received the apartment in 1973)</i></p>

Source: own elaboration

In contrast to the cognitive level, the level of pragmatic or concrete cultural practices emphasises the codes of capitalist and non-communist ideologies, sharply emphasising the values of “competition” and “conflict”. At the cognitive level, the need for “solidarity” is manifested against the background of the contradictions of pragmatic relations. Interestingly, in this case, Non-Capitalism codes are not observed on the level of pragmatic practices (Table 7).

Table 7: Quotes from narrative interviews: pragmatic aspects of the processes of allocating and obtaining apartments in Soviet Yerevan

Pragmatic level	
Ideology	Quotes
<p>Communism</p>	<p><i>I was single when getting the apartment. I wasn't married when I got this apartment, I was very happy. Of course, after working at CentCom (Central Committee), I was given this apartment, right after three years and I am very happy. I love my place a lot. (Received the apartment in 1980)</i></p> <p><i>For 35 years, I have worked in the “organs” – the police, and received the apartment for service. I queued and I received. (Received the apartment in 1981)</i></p>

Capitalism	<p><i>Well, our institute was the Institute of Energy, which was subject to Moscow. Well, the Ministry of Energy was the richest. That's why we were given an apartment in the centre, and not the outskirts. Our building was one of those with directors. My mother-in-law had been working at CentCom (Central Committee). (Received the apartment in 1971)</i></p> <p><i>For instance, I was given a first-floor apartment next to the garbage [room]. Switching the floor became a complicated story, either there should've been a good connection, or one should've had lots of money to be able to switch. (Received the apartment in 1986)</i></p> <p><i>In Soviet times, there was differentiation, there still is and will be. There are a thousand instances. The second in queue wouldn't receive an apartment, the next-to-last one would. Do you know how much money would heads of trade unions and directors make on the housing funds – they would make millions, this was very common. In 1986, I was personally offered to give 6000 USD to get an apartment in Nork, and I didn't agree as I didn't like those areas. And I did the right thing... (Received the apartment in 1991)</i></p>
Non-Communism	<p><i>In Soviet times, every apartment had its category, there was primary category, secondary, tertiary, made of brick, made of clay-brick, made of tuff. Our building is written as a tuff-brick building but tuff is only around the entrance, the rest is all made of concrete. They tricked the people. A brick building costs more than one made of concrete or monoete concrete. Up till now, it's written like that, that's one thing they lied about. (Received the apartment in 1975)</i></p> <p><i>Of course, we did have problems when getting an apartment. When we queued, I was the director of cooperative, and I was doing all that documentation myself. (Received the apartment in 1978)</i></p> <p><i>When constructing the building, there were things like there had to be a call from "the above" ... sometimes they would speculate that we'll give your building to others, that way wishing to get bribes and so. But of course, we didn't give anything, and they built it normally on time. (Received the apartment in 1978)</i></p>
Non-Capitalism	Missing

Source: own elaboration

Conclusion

The paper showcases that urban development processes with certain bases are subject to fail if not accompanied by respective cultural practices. Soviet Yerevan's living space is one of the most demonstrative cases of structural shifts in societal circumstances, where the failed attempt to shape a "Socialist space" therefore a "Soviet society," is apparent. Whether the state socialism has produced a space of its own, Lefebvre (1991, pp. 54-55; Murawski, 2018, p. 910) denied this, arguing that under socialism "no specific space has been created". Even the most grounded accentuations of communist superstructure which, as seen before, eventually become dominant in the cognitive perceptions of regular city dwellers, are not capable of realisation on the pragmatic level in the absence of spatial (in this case, housing space) opportunities of reproduction of the communist values.

Hence, this paper best describes the urban development processes during the Soviet times and the issues of interrelation between the political ideologies and cultural practices in the process of urban space development. Yerevan is an interesting case of a rapidly developed city with a high urbanisation rate. In this respect, it showcases issues of the extensive (and even artificially “boosted”) population of a city, where the ideological framework of city construction lost the link with everyday culture and the associated social practices, leading to unsynchronised and even contradictory ideologies on the sides of the state and of the people.

Through the case study of the city of Yerevan, this paper revealed the practices of the formation of the housing space as a reflection of the macro-political processes. Emphasising the practice of allocating and obtaining housing in the Soviet mass housing system, I showed the Soviet everyday experience of allocating and obtaining an apartment and manifestations of contradictions between the Soviet ideology and culture/everyday life experiences.

To show the contradictions between cognitive and pragmatic or between ideological and cultural practices of allocating and obtaining housing, I focused on two pure-type ideologies – communism and capitalism. I revealed that at the cognitive level the communist ideology was emphasised, especially accentuating the values of “equality” and “solidarity”. In contrast to the cognitive level, at the level of pragmatic or actual cultural practices, capitalist and non-communist ideologies were dominant, with a strong emphasis on the values of “competition” and “conflict”.

Summarising the process of allocating and obtaining housing in Soviet Yerevan, I can diagnose the contradictions between the ideological and cultural practices of a Soviet society. In the context of institutional frameworks and the contradictions of everyday practical life, there is a distortion of macro-interventions and the institutionalisation of informal mechanisms for the formation of the Soviet space. This leads to *inclusive ideologies* at the cognitive level and the circulation of *positioning ideologies* at the pragmatic level. Moreover, against this Soviet background and context, the decline of housing as a state ambition of the “Soviet space” was clearly emphasised.

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