

History Project Research Report

Minority Economic Landscapes in Post-Independence Peripheral Bulgarian

Cities:

The Cases of Kardzhali, Razgrad and Smolyan

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Political events such as wars, secession, and formation of new states do not only shift in political power in favor of one group to another, but also shift in what dominates economic landscapes. After Hayden and Walker (2013), I define the economic landscape as “a social space marked by physical icons” from small businesses to large factories and their symbolism and ideologies. Transformation of economic landscapes happens through changes of political power but also through demographic changes (massacres, migrations, relocations), and shifts in business and land ownership between the majority (newly dominant but previously subordinated) and minority (previously dominant but recently subordinated) groups.

Research Questions:

In my research I focused on domination as expressed through the construction of economic landscapes in peripheral cities where the economic domination of majority groups remains incomplete compare to major cities. I questioned whether there are general patterns of establishing domination and resistance through economic landscapes. I investigated what are they and how do such patterns vary in different minority cities in different periods? I hypothesized that a decrease in numbers of minority businesses correlate to an increase in political pressure towards minorities. My expectation before starting my research was to find taxation and urban planning policies specifically targeting minority economic landscapes.

Methodology:

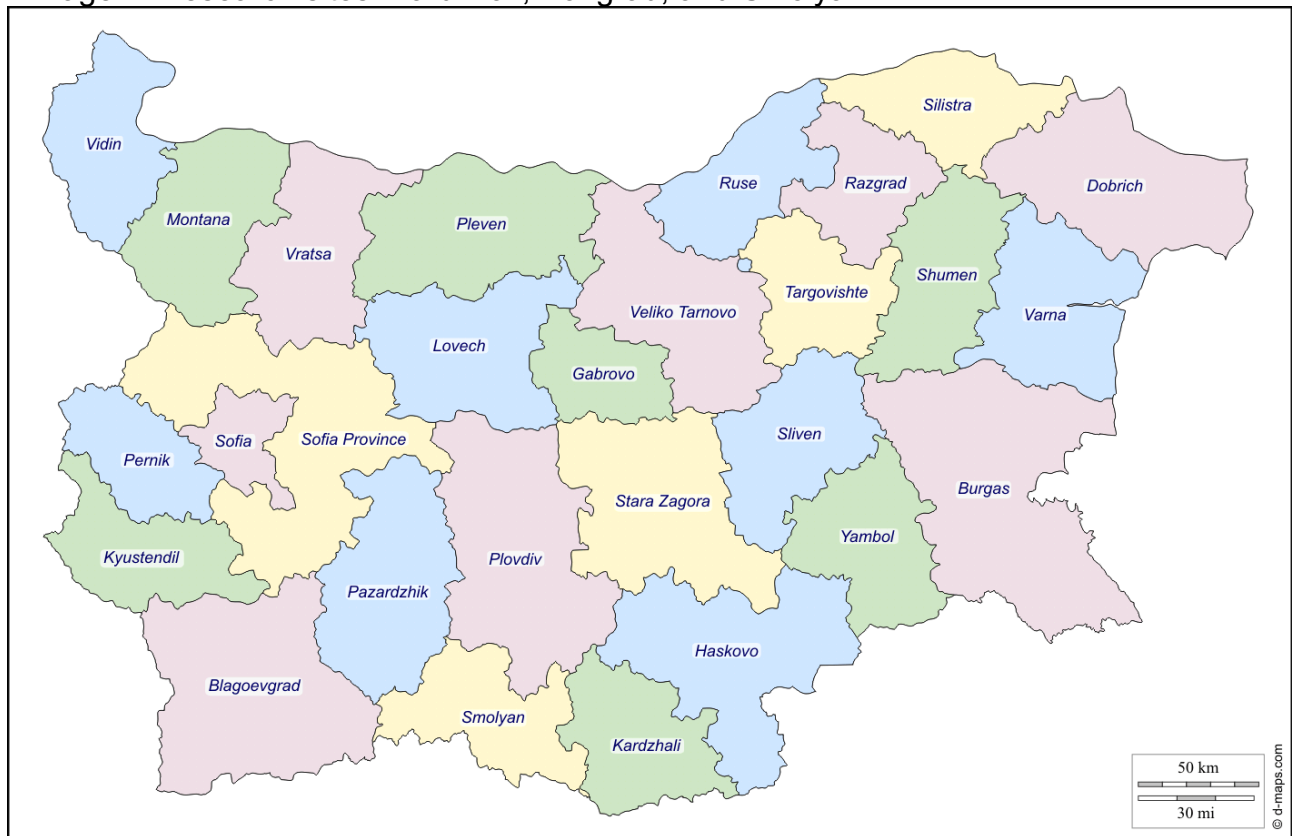
I have conducted my research in three peripheral cities in Bulgaria: Kardzhali, Razgrad, and Smolyan. I investigated historical sources in the libraries of Kardzhali, Razgrad, and Smolyan. I analyzed changes in the socioeconomic life of the city through social, economic, and political developments. I have looked at old city plans to locate changes in minority economic landscapes in relation to majority economic landscapes, such as appearance and disappearance, relocations, and renaming of minority businesses.

Research Sites:

Although all the three cities have a majority ethnic-Bulgarian population in the city centers, the majority of the population in their prefectures are Muslims, who are ethnic-Turks or Pomaks (Bulgarian-speaking Muslims). Smolyan has a population of 30.000 and is located in the borderlands of Bulgaria and Greece. Muslim Pomaks (Bulgarian-

speaking Muslims) account for about half of its population. Kardzhali borders Smolyan and Greece, and has a population of 45.000. While 70 percent of the region's residents are Turkish-speaking Muslims, only 35 percent of the city center's population are such. Razgrad is located in Northeastern Bulgaria with a population of 35.000. Turkish-speaking Muslims constitute 53 percent of the region's population, but only 19 percent of the city center's. Unlike Smolyan and Kardzhali which remained part of the Ottoman Empire until 1912, Razgrad was incorporated into Bulgaria in 1878.

Image 1: Research sites: Kardzhali, Razgrad, and Smolyan



Findings:

All the three cities are peripheral cities and share a condition of being cities where sizable Muslim communities have been living since the Ottoman era. Bulgaria was

incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in the 14th century. Contemporary Bulgarian lands were part of the empire until 1878 and 1912. Razgrad was incorporated into the semi-autonomous Principality of Bulgarian in 1878 while Kardzhali and Smolyan became part of Bulgaria only in 1912. That thirty-four-year difference has greatly affected the urban structure of the three cities.

During the Ottoman rule, Razgrad was an important but mostly agriculture oriented town. It had had a lively commercial and economic life. Most of the Muslim population were dealing with agricultural activities while merchants and artisans were mostly non-Muslims, such as Catholics, Bulgarians, and Armenians (Yavashov 1930: 160-162). As in cases in many Ottoman cities, there were ethno-religious specialization or segregation among the artisans. In other words, certain craft guilds were dominated by certain ethno-religious groups (Faroqhi 2009: 61). In the case of Razgrad, coarse woolen cloth makers¹, tailors, grocers, blacksmiths were almost exclusively Christian and/or Bulgarian while saddlers, furriers, tanners, and soap sellers were Muslim and/or Turkish (Yavashov 1930: 151). Smolyan and Kardzhali were relatively smaller and less important local centers. They were part of the socio-economic hinterland of the Western Thrace towns of Xanthi in the case of Smolyan, and Komotini in the case of Kardzhali. While there was a lively economic life in Xanthi and Komotini, the scale of the economy in Smolyan and Kardzhali during the Ottoman period were small. Because of their size and population, these two places could not be considered as towns but large villages.

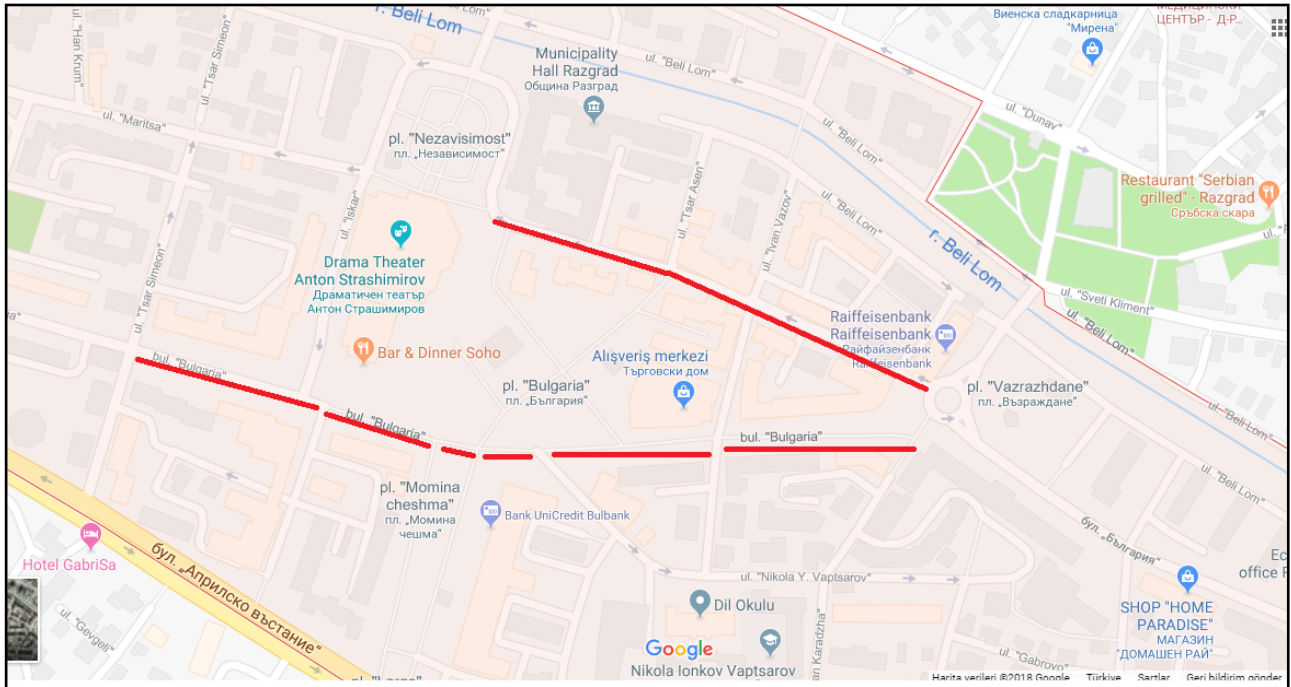
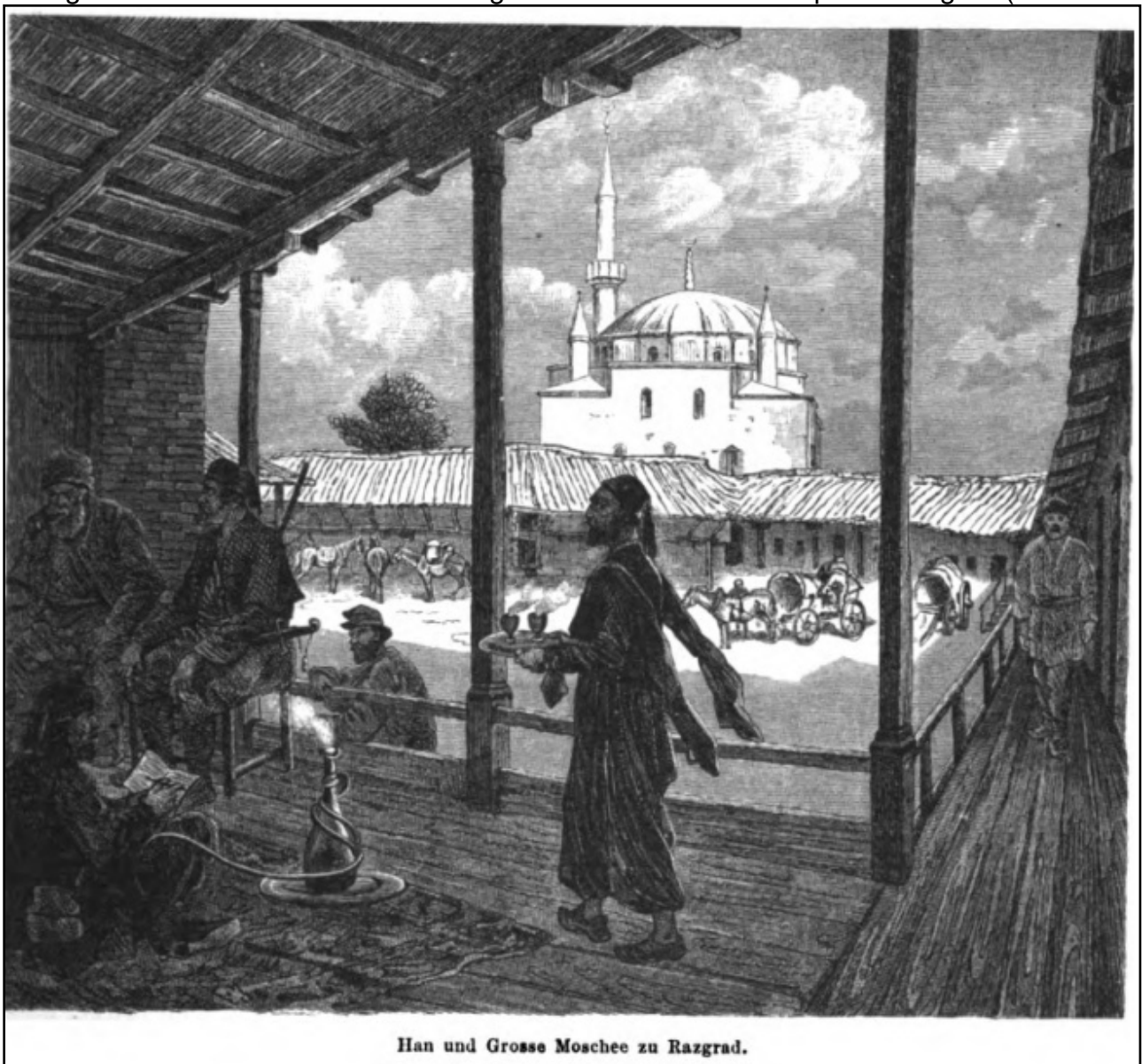


Image 2: The main streets of Razgrad where the economic life has taken place since the Ottoman era. (Source: Google Maps, modified by the author).

Even though the change of power from the Ottomans to the new Bulgarian nation-state greatly affected the cityscapes of Razgrad because Razgrad was an already established and important town, its city center remained the same: around its great mosque “Ibrahim Pasha mosque.” However, the buildings and the plaza around the mosque re-planned. The Ibrahim Pasha mosque was a mosque complex as it was the case in many Friday mosques in the Ottoman Empire. In other words, neighborhoods in the Ottoman cities were planned around religious spaces, mostly around mosques but also churches and synagogues. The Ottoman towns have had at least a large Friday mosque where many Muslims can gather for Friday and Eid prayers. Thus, the Ibrahim Pasha mosque was built with a library, soup kitchen, school, and *hamam*. After the 1878

and especially during the Nazi allied *Zveno* rule in the 1930s, as well as during the state-socialism five out of seven mosques of the city were demolished completely. Previously, the economic life of the city was around the mosque, as well. Following the demolition of many of them, a new and modern economic life was reshaped through the newly built street.

Image 3: An illustration of an inn facing the Ibrahim Pasha mosque in Razgrad (Kanitz



Han und Grosse Moschee zu Razgrad.

1877: 289)

Kardzhali, on the other hand, was a relatively smaller town. When the Bulgarian forces took the town in 1912, the economic life of the town was surrounded around its mosque, as well. However, this mosque was much smaller than the one in Razgrad. Following the incorporation of the city, the Bulgarian authorities moved the city center to its current position. The new center was used by the state-socialist city planners, as well. The new economic life was shaped on the street between the new and old centers.

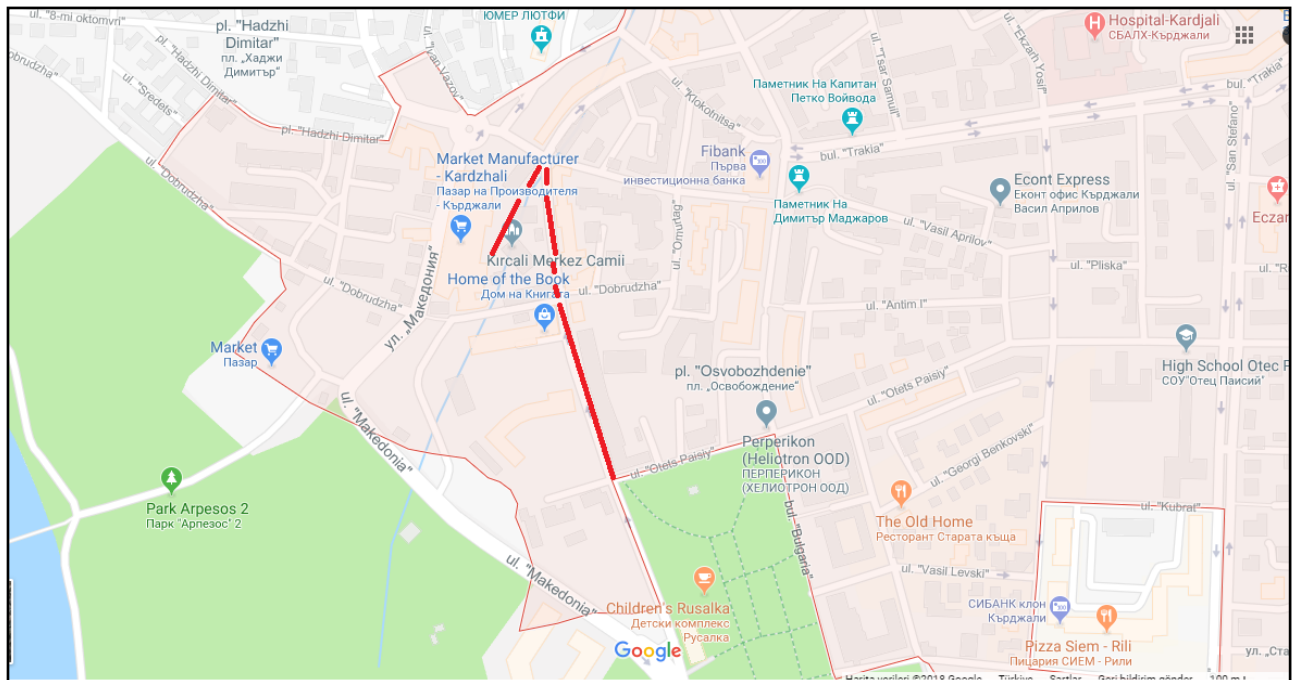


Image 4: The main street of Kardzhali where the economic life has taken place following its incorporation to Bulgaria (Source: Google Maps, modified by the author).



Image 5: A view from the main street of Kardzhali where the economic life has taken place following its incorporation to Bulgaria (Photo credit: the author).

Smolyan, however, has a unique case. The city was a large village during the Ottoman era. It was on the top of hard to reach the Rhodope mountains known as “*Pashmakli*.” Following its incorporation to Bulgaria in 1912 together with Kardzhali its center around its mosque was moved to the contemporary “*Star Sentar*” (“Old Center” in Bulgarian). The new economic life of the city started to blossom around the main street between the old and new centers, as it was the case in Kardzhali. Until the state-socialist era, Smolyan was a relatively small town. It was not large enough to serve as a regional

capital. Therefore, the state-socialist authorities decided to enlarge it by unifying Smolyan, and villages of Raykovo and Ustovo in 1960. After the unification, the state-socialist built a new center where they place the administrative and cultural buildings, such as town hall, hotel, and theater.

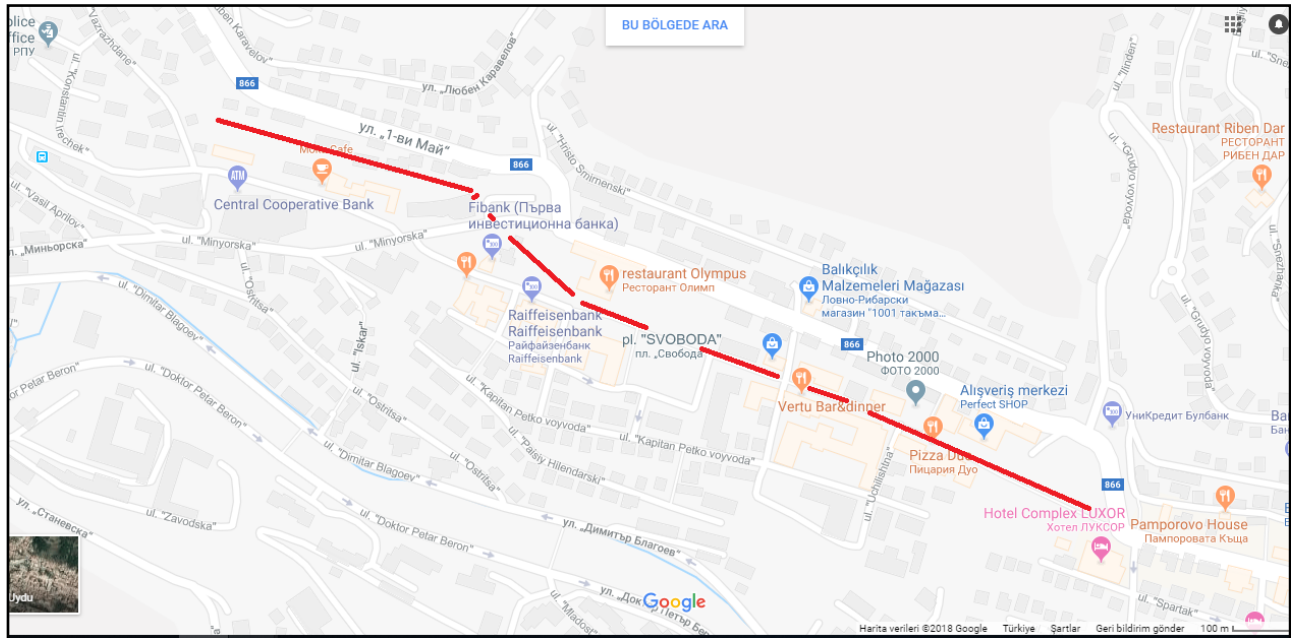


Image 6: The main street of Smolyan where the economic life has taken place following its incorporation to Bulgaria (Source: Google Maps, modified by the author).

One common feature among the three cities is that migration and expulsion of Muslims and ethnic-Turks were used not only as a “population control,” but also as an economic control instrument towards the minority groups. However, except during the state-socialism when almost exclusively all the economic life was controlled by the state and state owned enterprises, the remaining population of Muslims has had part of the economic life. This was not because of tolerable conditions towards them, but because

despite a decrease in their population they were still present in the cities. Especially after the collapse of the state-socialism in 1989 – 1991, the Muslim minority groups returned to be involved in the economic lives of the cities. This involvement, however, was mostly through small and medium sized enterprises.

Image 7: An abandoned tobacco factory in Raykovo neighborhood in Smolyan (Photo



credit: the author).

Tentative Conclusion:

Even though states and authorities have ambitions to shape and reshape economic life in the cities, they were not always successful. Such artificial interventions mostly failed, as in the case of the cities of this research. Despite all attempts of the authorities since

1878, the collapse of the state-socialism made the Muslim minorities to come back to economic life in the cities.