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This book was meant as a contribution to the debate associated to the attempt at explaining the divergent paths of postcommunist transformations. Another goal of this work was to go beyond the mere general reassertion of the usefulness of historical analysis in understanding postcommunist transformations; the book endeavours to develop a much more specific and theoretically accurate understanding of the causal role and of the nature of historical legacy.

The book „Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe” consists of three parts: „Postcommunist transformations and the role of historical legacies“, „Postcommunist Europe: continuity and change in
regional patterns”, and „Institutional redesign and historical legacies: case studies”.

In the chapter „Time, space and institutional change in Central and Eastern Europe”, G. Ekiert and S. Hanson direct their attention to theorising the „double contextuality” – temporal and spatial – of postcommunist transformations (p. 34).

In terms of temporal context, the authors state that the Leninist period can be understood as the extension of an older pattern of responses to technological and social development, dating from the 16th century (p. 40), but at the same time admit that it is relatively difficult to identify the specific structural mechanisms that have generated socio-political phenomena over long periods of time.

The Leninist legacies may be understood as reflecting the gradual decline and the disintegration of the charismatic impersonalism expressed by Marxist-Leninist ideology, by the Leninist party rule and the Stalinist planned economy (pp. 44-45). The authors admit that Leninism (as all totalitarian regimes) has its good sides; contemporary society made the transition to capitalism more easily, because society had turned from being agriculture-based to being predominantly educated in the urban environment, and thus more open to supporting liberal values and policies (p. 46).

In Chapter 2, „Accounting for postcommunist regime diversity: what counts as a good cause?”, Herbert Kitschelt starts from the idea that there exists a trend towards polarising regime types; the countries that used to have a totalitarian regime did not reverse course and become democratic (p.71). The author goes on to explain the diversity of post-communist regimes, which fall under four categories: full democracies (Baltic countries), semidemocracies, with a pattern of improvement throughout the 1990’s (Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova), initial semidemocracies with a pattern of slower or faster deterioration throughout the 1990’s (Belarus, Russia, Ukraine), full autocracies (pp. 96-98).

Chapter 3 analyses the patterns of postcommunist transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, and the author's attention turns towards
those communist legacies that „had the most important impact on specific paths of reform and types of transformation unfolding across the region during the first decade of postcommunism (p. 119). Political conflict patterns, institutional reforms or failures or the strategies for re-balancing regimes left behind enduring legacies. As a result of political crises and economic challenges, fundamental changes and adjustments were introduces not only in the policies applied by these regimes, but also in political and economic institutions (p. 120). Ekiert states that there are four groups of factors that need to be considered when explaining the unfolding transformation patterns: the legacies of the past and the original circumstances, the institutional options, the policies of the new governments and the level of support (p. 122).

Chapter 4, „Postcommunist spaces: A political geography approach to explaining postcommunist outcomes“, written by Jeffrey Kopstein and David Reilly, presents to the readers the crude model – the distance to the West –, the diffusion – stocks and flows –, the relevance of geography, external promoters and the establishment of interests. The crude model presented has two objectives: determining whether geographic factors have a political and economic influence, and examining how these factors relate to discrete changes over time (p. 159). The essence of any in-depth explanation of political and economic diffusion consists of a relation between stocks and flows and political and economic outcomes. Political geographers like to distinguish between the concepts of space and time. Far from being mere wordplay, these are concepts that show the important difference between geography’s subjective and objective traits (p. 189).

Chapter 5, „Redeeming the past: Communist after 1989“ opens Part III of the book, „Institutional redesign and historical legacies“. This chapter examines the ex-communist parties 1898-1999, communist elites and legacies, adoption strategies, effects of communist legacies on regeneration strategies and results. The continuity of successor parties of the former communist party is a strange paradox of democratic politics in Eastern and Central Europe. The survival and regeneration of successor parties is an anomaly because many analysts assumed that these
parties would disintegrate along with the other remnants of communist life, as political parties tend to resist general transformations (p. 197). The policies concerning the recruitment and promotion of the future elites have selected the future leadership of the party and established the level at which ideological calls took priority before pragmatic solutions (p. 208). The group of elites leading ex-communist parties nowadays was advanced by communist organizations, gaining experience and acquiring skills that proved decisive after 1989 (p.214).

Chapter 6, „Leninist legacies and the legacies of state socialism in postcommunist Central Europe's constitutional development” debates issues such as: Constitution development issues in Poland, Hungary and former Czechoslovakia, the Czech-Slovak conflict and the constitutional option. Researching the relationship between the institutional communist legacy and early constitutional decisions in the transition to democracy in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia gives rise to a number of interesting empirical issues; democracy supporters have used constitutions inherited from the old regimes as a starting point for institutionalizing democracy (p. 228). In Poland, Hungary and former Czechoslovakia, the transition was negotiated by round table talks between the representatives of the old regime and the democratic opposition; power transfer occurred in a perfectly legal manner, through a negotiated agreement, consistent with the existing law (p. 231). The trajectory of constitutional politics in postcommunist Central Europe provides a classic example of path-dependent socio-political process. Path dependence is explained thus: „once a country or a region has started down a certain path, the cost of turning back is very high... the consolidation of certain institutional structures prevents an easy change of the original option” (p. 255).

Chapter 7, „Historical legacies, institutions and the politics of social policy in Hungary and Poland, 1989-1999”, examines the debates on social policies, the social policy legacies in Poland and Hungary, and the social insurance policies in the early transition, the return of the „left”, the legacy of the past and the continuity of policies, ex-communist strategies in Poland and Hungary in the reform of the pension system,
and the state structures and political dynamics of the agreements concerning pension reform. Social policy is a vital component of overall post-communist transition and of democratic consolidation in particular (p. 262). Poland and Hungary have inherited quite well-developed social insurance programs from the two former imperial powers that used to dominate East-Central Europe (p. 268). All postcommunist governments have inherited a centralized system of social policies, which was very vulnerable to the lobbying efforts of certain persons, fact that allowed certain individuals in government and many occupational groups to deviate reform in the highest echelons of the administrative structure (p. 279).

Chapter 8 is dedicated to postcommunist unemployment politics: historical legacies and the unnatural acceptance of job loss brings into focus the question whether legacies are important, the alternative explanations for the political acceptance of unemployment, the origins of the unemployment taboo originating in the communist period and those originating in Hungary, the erosion of the communist taboo, and cross-national comparisons. Unemployment must be the main threat to the stability of post-communist policies (p. 304). This chapter argues that the mechanisms that destroy the unemployment taboo can only be understood as a result of the difference in the legacies of the late communist period. The explanations for this evolution of the notion of unemployment could be the following: unemployment was accepted as normal in the context of the general transition to market democracy and of the „return to Europe“ (p. 309), generous unemployment benefits dispersed the political danger of an explosion of the unemployment numbers (p. 310), unemployment cannot be ignored because people immediately found other jobs (p. 312).

In Chapter 9, Juliet Johnson presents institutions and design, passive design and the liberalization of the banking system, active design and the development of the central bank, and path contingency and institutional design. This chapter attempts to reconcile the dichotomous debate by calling on the „ordered contextual“ perspective of understanding post-communist institutional change as Eckert and Hanson
outlined at the beginning of the book. In active institutional design, the option for a certain policy is meant to replace, create or modify an institutional framework through the direct efforts of the state (p. 358). Most economic reform programs gradually resorted to active design policies in order to transform legal or financial frameworks or other institutional structures (p.371).

Chapter 10, „Cultural legacies of state socialism”, presents cultural legacies, the logic of cultural explanation, semiotic versus psychosocial conceptualizations of culture, postcommunism: cultural polarization, the nationalist-socialist hybrid and the precarious liberal and the strengthening of the nationalist-socialist hybrid and cultural and political polarization, cultural legacies of state socialism and / or of prior periods. The dominant analyses of the cultural legacies are guided by the same logic. Cultural legacies are is different from the material and institutional ones; they must be defined as behavior or thought patterns transmitted from the past and reproduced in the present (p. 386). The chapter analyzes the explicit cultural legacies of state socialism in Poland and Russia.

The book ends with an Epilogue by Paul Pierson, in which he states that the arguments in the arguments brought by this volume support in a very convincing manner the investigation of temporal contexts, but the same opportunities exist for exploiting space-related issues. Spatial relationships structure the nature of social interactions in the same way they do temporal relations (p.453).

Since Romania used to be a part of the former Soviet bloc, it is fortunate that Polirom decided to publish it in Romanian translation. This book could be offered as an example or as an explanation to those who are in key positions in government or politics, so that transition from the communist / centralized society to the democratic / capitalist society to be completed in less time and with visible effects. The book provides both a theoretical explanation of the phenomena that occur in society after the replacement of a communist regime, as well as offering case studies, applied in countries similar to Romania.