Illiberal smart urbanism? Lessons from the politics of state-led smart securitisation in Miskolc, Hungary

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Abstract

This article makes the case for the 'illiberal smart city' in response to a growing body of literature on the post-politicisation of smart urbanism. Drawing on the centralised rollout of an intelligent CCTV network in Miskolc, Hungary, under a regime that calls itself 'illiberal', the article proposes an alternative perspective on the politics of smart urbanism in continuation of dialogues on the 'actually existing smart city'. To this end, two key claims will be put forward. First, in contrast to mainstream post-political understandings of smart urbanism, Miskolc's smart surveillance project is wrapped up in an explicitly right-wing populist, and in certain respects racialised social ordering campaign. Second, not only is the CCTV network a key manifestation of a populist agenda, but it also reproduces the illiberal smart city through engineering a new consensus around securitisation without responding to the root causes of crime and segregation. Rather than engaging in depth with the digital technologies themselves, the article instead focuses on the underpinning politics of smart surveillance in Miskolc to show how, in the project's implementation, post-political ideas are replaced by the overt campaigning machinery of the illiberal state.

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摘要

本文为"非自由主义智慧城市"提出了理由，以回应越来越多的关于后政治化智慧城市的文献。借鉴匈牙利米什科尔茨（Miskolc，一个自称为"非自由主义"的政权）智能闭路电视网络的集中部署，本文提出了关于智慧城市政治的另一种观点，以继续就"实际存在的智慧城市"展开对话。为此，我们将提出两个关键主张。首先，与对智慧城市的主流后政治理解相比，米什科尔茨的智能监控项目被包装成一个明确的右翼民粹主义的、和在某些方面种族化的社会秩序运动。其次，闭路电视网络不仅是民粹主义议程的重要体现，而且还通过围绕安全化制定新的共识来复制非自由主义的智慧城市，而无需对犯罪和种族隔离的根本原因做出回应。本文没有深入探讨数字技术本身，而是关注米什科尔茨智能监控的基础政治，以表明在项目实施过程中，后政治思想如何被非自由主义政府的公开竞选机制所取代。

关键词

中东欧、非自由主义民主、右翼民粹主义、安全化、智慧城市

Introduction

Reflecting on changing governance arrangements and the role of the state under neoliberalism, Swyngedouw (2005: 2002) observed a global trend of the 'externalisation of state functions' to private actors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders. However, the opposite applies to Hungary, touted as an 'illiberal democracy' by its Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his right-wing populist government (Szelényi and Csillag, 2015). In 2010, Orbán's newly elected Fidesz party openly ousted the neoliberal paradigm, blaming the country's excessive dependence on Western capital for the particularly severe aftermath of the 2007–2008 global financial crisis. Driven by notions of a 'strong state' that can defend its national interests, the country's governance structure saw stark centralisation, with decision-making capacities concentrating in the hands of the state (Buzogány and Varga, 2018). The government utilised its two-thirds majority in parliament to authoritarian ends, seizing control over much of the country's public resources and media, undermining checks and balances, limiting judicial independence, weakening human rights NGOs and curtailing the power of local governments to fit broader national political agendas (Bárándy, 2014; Szicherle and Wessenauer, 2017).

Such transformations carry considerable implications for cities, primarily in terms of local governments' increased reliance on direct state funding and control. In 2015, the national government launched the Modern Cities Programme (MCP), a comprehensive state-driven urban development agenda for 23 Hungarian cities, with the aim of counterbalancing the socio-economic primacy of Budapest (Fekete, 2017). The MCP is unprecedented in scale and magnitude in national history, comprising 270 projects nationwide with a total budget of 4000 billion Hungarian forints (HUF) (£9.37 billion) (Government of Hungary, 2021). As part of the MCP, smart urbanism is a key development objective that receives extensive funding nationwide.

Once an industrial powerhouse, Miskolc, Hungary's fourth-largest city, has developed a reputation as a 'crime hotspot' due to

continued socio-economic decline after the collapse of state socialism in 1989. The closure of factories brought high unemployment, rising municipal debt, outward migration, exacerbated levels of racial and residential segregation and rapidly deteriorating public security (Halász, 2020). Through the populist plea of 'let there finally be order!' (Fidesz Miskolc, 2010: 1; my translation), Fidesz won the 2010 local elections in Miskolc, replacing a centre-left city administration. Backed by the national government, they promised a sweeping securitisation agenda to satisfy disillusioned voters desperate to break with the enduring crisis and a stigmatised city image. The leitmotif that 'Miskolc shall become the safest city in the country' (MIÖR, 2018: 3; my translation) soon became a cornerstone of Fidesz's nearly decade-long reign in the city until 2019 (Kujan, 2019).

The application of smart technology, facilitated by the MCP, played an important role in the new municipal leadership's two-pronged securitisation steamroller. This campaign entailed (a) a series of 'slum clearances' with forcible evictions and demolitions (OSCE, 2016), and (b) the bolstering of the Miskolc Municipal Police (MIÖR for short in Hungarian) with its defining constituent – a citywide smart CCTV system and its central operations control room (Minap.hu, 2014, 2019a). Implemented through the MCP, the smart surveillance system also became the leading project of Miskolc's emerging smart city strategy, confirming that securitisation was a clear policy priority for the council (Government of Hungary, 2017; Kujan, 2019; Miskolc City Council, 2017, 2018a, n.d.). Positioned at the intersection of smart urbanism and top-down populist securitisation, the CCTV network is particularly apt for researching the operation of Hungary's illiberal state at the urban scale.

This article makes two main arguments. First, in contrast to mainstream post-political understandings of smart urbanism, Miskolc's smart surveillance project initiated by the pre-2019 illiberal local government is wrapped up in an *explicitly* right-wing populist – and in certain respects racialised – social ordering campaign. In this arrangement, the CCTV network arguably serves to consolidate the aftermath of unjust evictions that were marked by open political battles against forcibly displaced marginalised residents and the liberal human rights organisations coming to their defence. Second, not only are the smart cameras a key manifestation of this populist politics but they also reproduce the illiberal smart city by engineering a new form of normative consensus around securitisation. Albeit CCTV is not a solution to the root causes of crime and segregation, the illiberal administration works to produce an illusion to the contrary, thereby normalising a new exclusionary order and a popular impression of a safer city. Rather than looking at the functioning of technologies and digital devices on the ground, the article focuses on the ways they are enrolled in illiberal political narratives and governance mechanisms (see Karvonen et al., 2019; Luque-Ayala and Marvin, 2020). Its objective thus chimes with Zuboff's (2019: 27) statement that 'our effort to confront the unprecedented begins with the recognition that we hunt the puppet master, not the puppet'.

The contribution of this article is twofold. First, it challenges dominant post-political conceptions of smart urbanism – which highlight hidden political agendas behind the concept's strategically engineered objective and techno-scientific representation (Lombardi and Vanolo, 2015; Wiig and Wyly, 2016) – through what it claims is an *explicitly* politicised state-led smart initiative. Hence, it supports the notion of the 'actually existing smart city' and the need to diversify monolithic – and, in our case, post-political – understandings of an otherwise highly variegated phenomenon (Sadowski

and Maalsen, 2020; Shelton et al., 2015). Second, it fills an empirical lacuna in critical smart urbanism in the under-studied region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). In so doing, the article responds to Datta's (2015: 6) claim that 'provincializing the smart city also means locating … alternative knowledges about the smart city'.

This article is structured as follows. It begins with a literature review of smart urbanism and post-politics, followed by methodological reflections. In the empirical section, it first discusses the heavy dependence of the city's development on state funding, then analyses the position of the smart CCTV network in an overtly politicised municipal securitisation agenda, makes some comparisons between surveillance in liberal and illiberal contexts and finally explores how smart securitisation further contributes to reproducing the illiberal (smart) city. It concludes that evidence from this research urges us to revisit post-political interpretations of smart urbanism in the context of Miskolc and Hungary.

Smart urbanism: A conceptual outline

In recent decades, data, software and computation have become central to organising urban life (Crang and Graham, 2007; Leszczynski, 2016). Urban policy strategies across the world have been increasingly influenced by narratives of 'smartness' (Kitchin et al., 2015b). Despite its overwhelming popularity, however, the precise meaning of the term 'smart city' remains debated (Hollands, 2008). Broadly speaking, it is an imaginary of high-tech, sustainable and inclusive urbanism driven by the digitisation of infrastructures, public services and the economy and the collection of enormous quantities of data about the population to optimise cities' operation, management and

performance (Manville et al., 2014; Townsend, 2013).

Besides the contested definition of the concept, a few key debates around its nature and application deserve closer attention. First, disagreements remain over whether smart urbanism is genuinely transformative for future urban growth or simply a reconfiguration of already existing development arrangements (Luque-Ayala et al., 2015). Corporate technology giants are eager to prove the former by attempting to sell alluring images of smart city packages to municipalities, promising to propel cities into a brighter future (Söderström et al., 2014). However, for Shelton et al. (2015), there is nothing new about the concept of smart urbanism, since the rationalisation of urban planning and services through techno-scientific and computational methods is well established. Proponents of this view claim that smart urbanism is just another expression of the neoclassical growth theory, in which technological innovation becomes the driver of economic development as human labour and capital reach their plateaus (Boianovsky and Hoover, 2009; Caragliu et al., 2011).

A second point of contention emerged between abstract approaches to the smart city as an all-encompassing global agenda that jeopardises cities' identity, and situated accounts that stress the importance of recognising the contextual embeddedness of smart projects. For the former, the planetary smart city drive is 'largely ahistorical, aspatial and homogenizing in their orientation and intent, treating cities as if they are all alike' (Kitchin, 2017: 49). Luque-Ayala and Marvin (2015: 2105) claim that one-size-fits-all discourses of smart urbanism 'are deeply rooted in seductive and normative visions' that portray digitisation as a spatially mobile and off-the-shelf panacea for all urban ills. From this perspective, smart city policy models are often disembodied, didactic and

characterised by the thematic compartmentalisation and quantitative benchmarking of cities' performance. Kitchin et al. (2015a) suggest that universal performance indicators are increasingly common in managing and measuring urban systems, since they ostensibly make cities more 'knowable', standardised and hence comparable along pre-defined indicators. They argue that 'such initiatives … advance a narrowly conceived but powerful realist epistemology … that is reshaping how managers and citizens come to know and govern cities' (Kitchin et al., 2015a: 6). Overall, then, there is a sense of discontent with smart city representations necessitating a seemingly uniform development trajectory that erodes the character of cities.

However, Shelton et al. (2015) challenge such universalising perspectives, and instead highlight the diverse manifestations of smart urbanism in practice in what they call the 'actually existing smart city'. They claim that, by viewing the phenomenon as spatially indifferent and technocratic, generic critiques of smart urbanism reproduce, rather than challenge, corporate representations (Shelton et al., 2015). Consequently, a growing body of work has endorsed 'a move away from a one-size-fits-all approach and towards piecemeal retrofitting through activities of tailoring and customising' (Karvonen et al., 2019: 5). For instance, Cugurullo (2018) elucidates how even ostensibly cohesive smart- and eco-city programmes in Hong Kong and Masdar can be highly fragmented. Similarly, Coletta et al. (2019) trace the emergence of the 'Smart Dublin' project, showing that, far from being integrated at the beginning, it was amalgamated from a happenstance bricolage of smaller initiatives. These writings, among others, demonstrate that smart urbanism tends not to entail a total reorganisation of cities, but instead emerges from pre-existing and situated configurations (Karvonen et al., 2019).

Building upon the notion of the 'actually existing smart city', there has been a recent body of work on 'provincialising' smart urbanism (Burns et al., 2021; Datta, 2015). The concept indicates a need to promote alternative sources of knowledge production from the global 'margins', thereby decentring dominant Western theoretical traditions (Datta, 2015). From an empirical viewpoint, although studies on smart cities abound globally, I have found no critical city-level social scientific studies on the topic in the semi-peripheral region of Central Eastern Europe (CEE) as of February 2022. In speaking to this empirical lacuna, the article thereby hopes to show the value of researching CEE cities for the literature on provincialising smart urbanism.

(Post-)politics and the smart city

A third major debate relevant to this study concerns the politics of the smart city, comprising two main viewpoints: (a) post-politicisation through top-down initiatives, and (b) re-politicisation through grassroots movements.

Post-political theory suggests that, amidst contemporary trends of neoliberal governance, political dissent in decision-making is becoming strategically enfeebled (Rancière, 1999). In what is usually described as 'the retreat of the political' (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 2005: 117), disputes between the traditional Left and Right are seen to be subsumed by techno-managerial and consensual governance, proclaiming that expert knowledge is more qualified to handle policy questions than is the public (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014; Žižek, 2005). However, Rancière (1999) regards the annihilation of political engagement as an elite project to normalise inequality at the expense of the poor. Some therefore deem 'the fantasy of a politics without politics' (Dean, 2009: 21) untenable. Indeed, for Mitchell et al. (2015)

the development of a post-democratic consensus is in itself a political achievement and the solidification of a hegemonic order.

Post-political approaches to 'mainstream' top-down and corporate smart urbanism suggest that its seemingly apolitical implementation often cloaks profiteering motives that uphold the neoliberal status quo (for example, Lombardi and Vanolo, 2015; Söderström et al., 2014). Indeed, the operation of smart cities is routinely portrayed as a set of common-sensical, rational and non-ideological initiatives that benefit the common good (Kitchin et al., 2015a). However, some suggest that, despite a neutral guise, smart city agendas are politically charged, frequently align themselves with the dictates of the market, exclude the public, and serve dominant power structures (Kitchin et al., 2015b; Rossi, 2016; Wiig and Wyly, 2016).

Others posit that grassroots initiatives hold the potential to reintroduce political dissent into the smart city (Rossi, 2016). They argue that the likes of start-up firms, hackathons, incubators, open-source software platforms, fab labs and social media initiatives bypass traditional governance structures and create novel arenas of political engagement through community-building, dialogue, creativity and resistance (see Charnock et al., 2021; Luque-Ayala and Marvin, 2020; Rossi, 2016).

That said, a configuration where political narratives are *overtly* propagated in a top-down and state-led form of smart urbanism is underexplored. There are, of course, important critical engagements with state-led examples and their political implications in liberal and more authoritarian contexts alike. This includes the shortcomings of mismatching centralised agendas and local development needs in the UK (Taylor Buck and While, 2017), the rise of the 'entrepreneurial state' in orchestrating smart city development at the behest of social justice in India (Datta, 2015), the entrenchment of

pragmatist technocratic authoritarianism through smart initiatives imbued with dominant state logics in Singapore (Ho, 2017), and state control over local governments and the private sector, tokenistic public participation and 'uncritical technological solutionism' in China (Zhang et al., 2022: 1). However, these analyses largely focus on the de-politicised and techno-managerial nature of state policy seeking to legitimise smart cities, whereas the explicit politicisation of smart urbanism from above in the context of an illiberal state is yet to be studied. Therefore, the heavily centralised and politically charged urban governance system of Hungary and Miskolc presents a productive research setting.

Social sorting and surveillance

Many have discussed the social sorting and racial profiling implications of the technological operation of smart surveillance, predictive policing and artificial intelligence algorithms (for example, Amoore, 2020; Graham, 2005; Jefferson, 2018). Cognisant of these contributions, my focus remains on political considerations in Miskolc, given that the very functioning of smart technologies in the CCTV system is somewhat premature (for example, several smart functions are not live yet owing to slow servers and data transmission speeds), and empirical research yielded limited evidence on their ability to produce or reconfigure social and political arrangements in themselves.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative multi-method approach comprising 34 in-depth semi-structured interviews, the analysis of 51 official documents, a site visit to the central control room of the CCTV system, and participant observation at a public security family event and a council meeting. Media

outlets were also utilised as secondary sources and were triangulated with official documentary data wherever possible.

Interview participants were identified and recruited based on their involvement in, association with, or informed interest in Miskolc's smart city project and securitisation agenda, as well as related decision-making practices and controversies. Snowballing was then applied within the desired criteria. Out of the 34 interviews, 29 were one-to-one conversations and 5 were with groups comprising 2–11 participants. Interviewees included policymakers from the municipality and affiliated government institutions, law enforcement representatives, community workers, human rights activists, academics, a journalist, the CEO of a local business and residents, some of whom live in segregated areas. Owing to occasional logistical constraints and COVID-19, 11 interviews were conducted online; the rest took place face-to-face. All interviews were voice recorded with the participants' advance informed consent and lasted between 26 minutes and 1 hour and 48 minutes. All conversations were conducted and transcribed in Hungarian and translated upon analysis.

The use of interviews for understanding illiberal smart urbanism in Miskolc was informed by the idea that technology in itself – that is, the 'puppet' in Zuboff's (2019) phrasing – does not have a political function (Hall, 2017). Instead, this role belongs to the driving regime or 'puppet master' (Zuboff, 2019) behind its implementation. If we are to facilitate more socially equitable policies, then 'the state and other forms of governance remain key areas for challenging processes of exclusion and disempowerment' (Swyngedouw, 1996: 1052). Interviewing policymakers and institutional representatives has yielded first-hand accounts of the operation of the 'puppet master', while other actors and residents enabled a closer understanding of how this operation was received, applied, negotiated or challenged, all helping to build an analysis in support of social justice.

In addition, official documents were utilised to triangulate interview data and were identified based on their relevance to smart urbanism, securitisation and surveillance in Miskolc. The documents involved a mix of local and national development strategies, minutes of council meetings, policy presentations, legal texts, reports by local and international NGOs and independent field studies. Most of them were publicly available online, and a few were privately obtained with policymakers' assistance.

Empirical data were analysed using thematic coding and annotation. Coding themes included, for instance, governance and centralisation, digital data management, policing methods, crime stereotypes, racialisation, segregation and right-wing populist security discourses.

Smart surveillance in Miskolc at a glance

'Crime, policing, cameras. That's all it was', a local surmised about the municipality's public communication of smart urbanism in Miskolc. Indeed, the intelligent surveillance network was the flagship project of the municipal smart city strategy. According to a policymaker, the strategy began with just the CCTV system, and then expanded into various smaller state-funded developments beyond the scope of this article, from public wi-fi on trams to smart grids, a smartphone app for tourists and a public error-reporting app (see Coletta et al., 2019; Miskolc City Council, 2018a). However, the CCTV system received by far the largest amount of publicity and funding: it was allocated 1.7 billion HUF (£3.98 million) of government money out of the total smart city budget of 6.3 billion HUF (£14.76 million) (Government of Hungary, 2017; Miskolc City Council, 2017, n.d.). The fact that the

CCTV became the foremost element of the smart city bundle was a statement of the council's policy priorities (Minap.hu, 2019b).

The CCTV network was still under development at the time of writing this article. It entails a planned 768 cameras across the city, of which 218 were operational as of November 2021 (MIÖR, 2021b; Miskolc City Council, 2017, 2018b). They are connected to a central control room – the most advanced of its kind in Hungary – where real-time CCTV footage is displayed on a wall of screens that municipal guards observe and analyse 24 hours a day (Minap.hu, 2019b). The cameras are capable of software-enabled intelligent functions, such as spotting unattended items, reading licence plates, identifying group gatherings and detecting vehicles entering or parking in unauthorised areas (Adaptive Recognition, 2020).

All about the state? Foundations of the illiberal smart city

Regarding the recent opening of the control room and the development of the CCTV network, a representative of the municipal police explained that 'the will of big politics has materialised, and now we are the beneficiaries'. (Smart) urban development in Miskolc, including the CCTV network, is fundamentally dependent on state financing through the MCP, which is vital to understanding its governance mechanisms (Miskolc City Council, 2017). As expert interviewees have pointed out, smart urbanism in Hungary is currently a governmental responsibility towards society. They stressed that smart city projects, and particularly the CCTV system, would not have been possible at such a large scale and magnitude without state financing. The abundance of national funds leaves Miskolc umbilically connected to the government and limits alternative forms of

governance-beyond-the-state (Swyngedouw, 2005).

At the same time, one might ponder why corporate players and their off-the-shelf development solutions are absent from Miskolc (see Söderström et al., 2014). Interviews with different interest groups suggested that the primary reason is that MCP money is flowing to cities in abundance and hence there is no real discussion, competition or motivation to think. According to a business representative, 'for investors, the greatest discouragement is that the municipality pays for everything'. Or, as a policy-maker said, 'thankfully, we are expecting so much [state] money that we are having a hard time spending it wisely and effectively'. Consequently, public funding is obstructive to the market because the centralised model of MCP enfeebles private-sector creativity and investment.

Although the municipality does contract private companies for specific projects through tendering procedures, this does not generate sufficient market demand. Instead, there are well-established connections with existing contractors that are very difficult to diversify, in what Csukás and Szabó (2018) call 'vendor lock-ins'. They argue that such lock-ins pose considerable hindrances to marketising smart urbanism across Hungary and accessing more advanced products and services from alternative suppliers. This way, the lack of motivation for private investors, start-ups and creative developers allows minimal scope for creative growth and entrepreneurship.

When exploring private-sector involvement, data ownership is another vital consideration in the politics of smart urbanism (Kitchin, 2017). In contrast to Zuboff's (2019) insights on corporate technology giants' shady and untransparent evasion of formally imposed data regulations, this study found little empirical evidence for such loopholes. Private actors are practically

absent from the operation of the control room, since all of it is owned and managed by the local government and MIÖR. The equipment and software of the CCTV system were supplied by the Hungarian firm Intellio (Adaptive Recognition, 2020), but they have not responded to questions about their access to data at the time of writing this article. The collection and storage of CCTV data are nevertheless tightly regulated by the GDPR and the Hungarian 1999 LXIII Law on the policing of public space; all recordings are stored centrally and erased after 30 days, and thus there is no space left for business interests and the commercial use of data (Government of Hungary, 2017; MIÖR, 2019; Netjogtar.hu, 2020). Consequently, although the corporate smart city presents controversies about private companies' data management practices, such concerns are less relevant in the case of Miskolc.

Considering the above, neoliberal commentaries on post-politics that suggest the emergence of 'stakeholderism' (Mitchell et al., 2015: 2636) – and the state governing in line with the demands of the market (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014) – are not readily transposable to a context where the state and its cemented contractors hold a monopolistic position over the projects.

The politics of (smart) securitisation in Miskolc

Understanding the considerable emphasis on smart CCTV in the city's governance requires an engagement with the political environment that brought it into being (see Zuboff, 2019). This section shows that post-political discussions of smart urbanism can be countered not only through grassroots politics (for example, Rossi, 2016) but also through explicitly politicised state-led projects. On the one hand, the study of top-down state-driven examples is not entirely

new in itself (see Ho, 2017; Taylor Buck and While, 2017; Zhang et al., 2022), and it has also long been established that smart urbanism is always political and serves broader goals, even in liberal democracies, albeit frequently behind a cloak of pragmatic and rationalising neutrality (Kitchin et al., 2015b; Rossi, 2016). On the other hand, what makes the notion of the smart city illiberal in Miskolc is its embeddedness within an openly populist – rather than purely techno-managerial – political agenda of securitisation. This agenda combines forcible slum clearances and the modernisation of the municipal police – and especially the smart surveillance system and its central control room – into the same discourse of establishing order in the city, underpinned by the stigmatisation of the city's segregated population and the liberal human rights NGOs trying to protect them.

Harnessing prejudice and social binaries

The politics of illiberal (smart) securitisation is founded upon the racialised image of poor public safety in Miskolc (see Halász, 2020). Many interview participants highlighted a general perception of Miskolc being a dangerous city but also concurred that this was seldom supported by first-hand experiences. Instead, a general sense of fear is fuelled by widespread prejudice against the city's Roma, whose proportion in the local population is well above the national average (Pénzes et al., 2018). Anti-Roma sentiments are particularly strong in the post-industrial context of Miskolc. After the 1989 regime change and the closure of factories, the Roma were among the first to become unemployed and marginalised, and they soon turned into the primary scapegoats for the city's social problems, economic decline and soaring crime rates (Ladányi, 2010 [1991]). As a local academic suggested,

You can win votes with anti-Gypsyism. Many votes. … And politicians have ruthlessly capitalised on this prejudice … in the public eye, the Gypsies are poor and the Gypsies are criminals. There is nothing to sugar-coat about this. And this is why the sorts of 'tough' city politics, with the CCTV etc., are always popular.

Indeed, since its election in 2010, the Fidesz municipality has actively played on people's racialised sense of fear. They attributed public security problems to the 'mushrooming of slums in Miskolc between 2002 and 2010 [that is, under the previous left-wing local government]' (Miskolc City Council, 2019: 10; my translation), which were seen to harbour groups who 'cannot adhere to basic rules of co-habitation' (Fidesz Miskolc, 2010: 5). What is more, the then-deputy mayor endorsed the openly racist sentiments of one of the city's past police captains (Miskolc City Council, 2019), who stated in 2009 that all public robberies in Miskolc are committed by Roma people (Index.hu, 2009). The deputy mayor denounced the captain's subsequent dismissal as an 'ultraliberal' decision of the centre-left government at the time, and it was against this thinking that 'a new security politics had to be proclaimed' (quoted in Miskolc City Council, 2019: 19; my translation). Far from being consensual, then, the city administration overtly positioned its own security politics against the idea of the 'liberal enemy' comprising the city's 'disorderly' segregated minority and the pre-2010 left-wing welfarist regime.

The strongmen and the slum: Illiberal securitisation in operation

The Fidesz municipality's drive for a 'new era of order in Miskolc' (Miskolc City Council, 2018b: 6; my translation) emerged as an openly politicised campaigning weapon underpinned by an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. The leading security interventions of

forcible slum clearances and the bolstering of (smart) policing became the two sides of the same coin – that is, an illiberal agenda of protecting the 'decent' population from the 'unruly' Other and their liberal supporters (see Scheiring and Szombati, 2020).

Although not part of smart developments per se, demolitions and evictions in segregated areas are powerful indicators of the operation of the illiberal 'strongman' politics that also underscored smart security developments. The then-mayor called the municipality's battle against segregated neighbourhoods one of their 'most important urban policy causes' (quoted in Minap.hu, 2016) after a populist anti-slum petition was signed by 35,000 residents of Miskolc (Minap.hu, 2016). The largest clearance took place in a deprived area near the city centre called the 'Numbered Streets', where the council evicted hundreds of mostly Roma residents without offering alternative housing, and conducted a series of intimidatory police raids across many segregated neighbourhoods (HCLU, 2017). Despite the protests of local Roma families and human rights organisations, and multiple court rulings against the local government proclaiming the discriminatory nature of the evictions, the mayor declared that the municipality had no intention of halting the process (Minap.hu, 2016; OSCE, 2016). He said they were in conflict with 'just about every liberal human rights organisation' (Baznyesz-Miskolc.hu, 2016; my translation), who are 'not in a position to tell us what we can do for our own safety in Miskolc' (quoted in Jurák, 2019; my translation). Far from the consensual ideal postulated by post-political commentators (Mouffe, 2000), the illiberal regime's framing of slums and human rights NGOs as security threats further feeds into an open political battle against the 'liberal evil'.

The local government's attitude to slum clearances reflects its political motives

behind the installation of the smart surveillance system. In official documents and press releases, slum removals and the smart CCTV network are frequently mentioned as part of the same vision of the orderly city, and are seen to build upon each other (for example, Kujan, 2019; Miskolc City Council, 2018b). A policy proposal detailing the installation of smart cameras in the Numbered Streets begins with the sentence. 'In recent years, Miskolc City Council has taken firm steps towards establishing order and clearing up slums, since public safety is in *our* common interest … across Miskolc' (Office of the Mayor of Miskolc, 2019: 2; my translation, emphasis added). Again, the term 'us' is used in an exclusionary manner, suggesting that the smart cameras are essentially a continuation of the securitisation programme pioneered by the discriminatory slum clearances. This is reflected in a local's remark that, 'thanks to the cameras and other measures, the city centre has been cleared of the kinds of people who were not supposed to be here'. In other words, while the slum clearances removed the marginalised from near the city centre, the cameras ensured that their presence would be contained and policed in favour of the 'majority' society, in a continued reflection of right-wing populist political measures.

With all that said, the use of CCTV for populist social ordering is not unique to the illiberal city – indeed, it also has a contested history of coercive and discriminatory applications in ostensibly liberal democracies (for example, Carr, 2016; Coleman, 2004; Davis, 1990). Additionally, CCTV development is often implemented in a top-down fashion and without much public involvement even under liberal administrations (Kroener, 2016).

Understanding the unique workings of the illiberal state in producing the smart city vis-à-vis its liberal democratic counterparts therefore requires a shift of attention from exclusionary outcomes towards paths of legitimation and background motivations. In a liberal democratic setting, smart urbanism and surveillance must be *framed* in ways that adhere to principles of freedom and equity to attain legitimacy (Hall, 2017). Today, this entails strategies of post-political consensus-building through presenting cameras as 'what the public wants' (Coleman, 2004: 199), a means of protecting the community from delinquency and ensuring the uninterrupted democratic rule of law (Hall, 2017). The technocratic façade of a consequent 'surveillance consensus' (Hempel and Töpfer, 2009: 157) in combatting fear of crime is well-nigh impossible to challenge because critics are portrayed as enemies of public order and dissent is further quashed by silencing those who are excluded through previously discussed ways of post-political consolidation (Dean, 2009; Hempel and Töpfer, 2009; Rancière, 1999). The normative legitimation of otherwise exclusionary practices comes hand in hand with maintaining a liberal veneer of diversity and a seamless consumer culture (Hall, 2017; Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014).

In contrast to this is the unrestrained campaign of Miskolc's local government against liberal human rights NGOs and 'non-compliant' minorities, utilising explicit spatial stigma and racially loaded sentiments to rally an embittered public behind securitisation interventions *without even attempting to maintain an illusion of respect for human rights*. Although socially unjust outcomes in Miskolc may 'symptomatically' resonate with liberal contexts in some respects, what is new to the illiberal smart city is that it has arguably been *recruited to exclude in overt ways* in contrast to upholding the status quo behind the smokescreen of consensus in a post-politicised liberal system.

The populist rollout of smart CCTV in Miskolc may seem like a recourse to post-Keynesian punitive policies in seeking to cover up structural inequalities and

criminalise the poor (see Coleman, 2004; Davis, 1990), but its background motivations are markedly different. To cite a recent example, Wiig's (2018) work on smart securitisation in the liberal democratic context of post-industrial Camden, New Jersey, suggests that smart surveillance facilitated the revitalisation and strengthened social control of certain zones of the city to attract private corporate and real estate investors. In contrast, the absence of large-scale business partnerships and lobbying in relation to the smart CCTV project in Miskolc, as discussed before, suggests a more electorally fuelled campaign that serves to entrench the illiberal city and boost popularity at the polls rather than serving the interests of private capital, which is further explained below.

Consolidating a new illiberal status quo: Smart surveillance and the securitisation imperative

While the slum clearances turned into an open battleground against liberalism, the smart CCTV project served as a catalyst for cementing the right-wing populist political will of securitisation into a new 'normal', thereby reproducing the illiberal city. The previously analysed discursive framing is far from post-political, but the process of consolidation does exhibit consensus-bound traits *akin* – but certainly not tantamount – to post-political conditions, which adds further nuance to understanding illiberal smart urbanism in Miskolc.

Although CCTV does not address the root causes of crime – as settled in the literature long ago (for example, Fyfe and Bannister, 1996) – the populist administration sought to suggest the opposite. In this way they produced new illiberal urban realities founded upon the acceptance of discriminatory exclusion and widespread backing for new cameras, even in places previously targeted by stigmatising rhetoric and

evictions. Crime rates in Miskolc reduced by two-thirds under Fidesz, so the subsequent sense of societal satisfaction has earned securitisation considerable support (Miskolc City Council, 2019). According to an NGO representative, installing cameras across the city has a knock-on effect, because their crime reduction capabilities are easy to 'sell' to the public. Since cameras only displace crime rather than addressing its root causes, there is a need to 'patch up' newly affected areas with further cameras, which necessitates a drive for expansion. With reference to neighbourhood forums, a community worker said that public security always comes up and 'everyone wants two cameras in front of their flats'. The allure of expanding the CCTV network is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that even some slum dwellers – in areas where demolitions did not take place or were halted – expressed a need for more cameras and safety measures in interviews. Although the illiberal municipality demonised segregated neighbourhoods, it subsequently demonstrated a 'remarkable ability to claw back popular support' (Scheiring and Szombati, 2020: 728) by conveying a message that everyone benefits from the CCTV's enhancement of public safety.

The populist interventions transformed securitisation from a policy choice into a development imperative, as political popularity in Miskolc continues to hinge upon perpetuating the façade of a more orderly city. For the unified opposition, who won the 2019 local elections, it was clear that defunding policing and the CCTV system would undermine their support in a prejudice-fuelled electoral environment. As a result, not only did they maintain the Fidesz administration's substantially increased municipal policing budget, but they also allocated extra funds for street patrols to avert criticism (MIÖR, 2018, 2021a; Miskolc City Council, 2020). Despite the

fact that an extended policing apparatus requires more funding, the new local government arguably has no choice but to retain a focus on policing rather than shifting to emancipatory endeavours and tackling the root causes of crime. The illiberal local government steered the city's politics onto a new trajectory of consensus, where maintaining an expensive image of a safer city remains the only possible way ahead. Although this almost reflects a post-political sense of 'we're all in this together' (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014: 8), the securitisation consensus across the political spectrum is arguably a forced trajectory, whereby the motivations once again revolve around a fear of losing electoral popularity rather than serving the needs of capital.

Conclusion

Underlining the value of the 'actually existing smart city', this article has responded to mainstream post-political accounts by claiming that smart urbanism can be overtly political under a centralised illiberal regime. Although many have argued that smart cities are always political, even in liberal democracies, these political agendas are *hidden behind*, and legitimated through, an illusory consensual mirage that technological development serves everyone's benefit. Thus far, the re-politicisation of the smart city has been chiefly studied through bottom-up initiatives. In the democratically backsliding regime of Hungary, however, the state has wielded smart surveillance in Miskolc to consolidate right-wing populist development visions, thereby offering a hitherto underexplored top-down perspective on politicising smart urbanism.

The article has developed the idea of the illiberal smart city from three main angles. First, it scrutinised the state-led governance structure and the limited involvement of the private sector in smart urbanism in Miskolc,

suggesting that it is precisely the state's quasi-monopolistic control over (smart) urban development in Miskolc that paved the way for illiberal policies.

Second, it showed that the CCTV system and the central control room in Miskolc have been enrolled in the municipality's populist securitisation campaign. An 'orderly city' was envisioned through an openly hostile stance towards the marginalised, particularly the Roma, as well as liberal human rights NGOs. Therefore, populist slum clearances and municipal police developments, including the CCTV system, cannot be isolated from their underpinning illiberal politics, again in contrast to consensual decision-making. Although surveillance has been widely shown to serve populist agendas in liberal democratic settings too, the two main ways that Miskolc's illiberal case proves to be unique is the explicitness of its legitimation and the project's electorally motivated rather than profit-oriented implementation.

Finally, the politics of smart surveillance in Miskolc not only reflects but also reproduces the illiberal city, fashioning a new form of consensus around securitisation funnelled into right-wing populist rather than depoliticised agendas. The displacement of 'unwanted' slum dwellers creates a superficial impression of improved safety, the maintenance of which necessitates the continued financing of security that further excludes, rather than emancipates, the marginalised.

Overall, there is an overt illiberal politics to smart urbanism in Miskolc that cannot be ignored. This has provided an opportunity to further 'provincialise' existing understandings of smart urbanism by decentring Western post-political and neoliberal accounts, exposing such perspectives as only one – rather than *the* all-encompassing – way that smart cities manifest themselves. Consequently, if we are to take the quest to 'provincialise' smart cities seriously, our

work requires continued reflection, nuance and sensitivity to locality.

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