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ABSTRACT

CITY FLUX - RESHAPING URBAN PATTERNS

in the city of Skopje

One of the most renowned 20th century's architects in Macedonia – Boris Čipan, in one of his interviews discussing the state of Skopje, back in 2010 would say: "It is out of doubt that the cities are created by the politics and are affected by their ideology, but what is most important is the intellectual capacity of those politicians and the way they reshape the city".

In the case of Skopje, we have different examples of reshaping the urban morphology, affected by socio-political systems and different social and political factors in the past 60 years.

The catastrophic collapse of the historical city tissue of Skopje, as a result of the devastating earthquake in July 1963, created a chance for the first detailed modernization of Skopje, where in the period of Real Socialism, new planning ideologies were established, new visions of social organization for communal living were developed and new art styles were created. This way of thinking reflected art and urban design of all communist countries, including former Yugoslavia as well. In the case of Skopje, it is a process resulting in new social modernist city as one of the best examples of modernization in the Balkans.

The process of reshaping the post - quake Skopje was according to the winning Master Plan proposal of the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange and the collaboration team from Yugoslavia.

The Master Plan expresses Kenzo Tange believes of integrating the contemporary methods of architecture and urban design and convert them into spatial structures, designed as a flexible bridge between the growing technology at the time and its inflexible elements.

The construction of the city was happening rapidly, resulting in many modern buildings designed by local and international architects. Unfortunately, the Plan was not completed in its full capacity, layering the city in fragments, that later will become empty spaces suitable for further interventions.

After the breakup of Yugoslavia, Skopje has undergone several processes of radical, social, political and economic transformations, processes that have had a major effect on the planning system and further influenced the city's built environment. The last thirty years of Skopje's development have been marked by long and painful transition, a process through which the city had to adjust to the new complexities.

In 2010, the project "Skopje 2014" was presented to the public for the first time, promoted by the then-ruling coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE and was consisted of defined plans and designed projects, primarily only known to the government, and out of any logical discourse for the city concept.

The project aim was toward rebuilding national past of Macedonian people, based on the governmental ideological platform, throughout aesthetical and stylistic methods.

These changes were directed mostly towards the city center, divided in many phases including rebuilding the old national monumental buildings lost in the earthquake, building new architectural structures in some strange and undefined style (mixture of baroque, neoclassicism and romanticism), getting close to a period of time that was never relevant and popular at the territory of today's Republic of North Macedonia.

This was a mission developed by few planners and never publicly discussed nor developed, calling into question its background motives and the transparency of the quick approval by the officials.

Consequently, the urban space in Skopje was altered to become a space for demonstrating an attitude, where urban patterns are in continuous change in these times of economic, social, political and ideological turmoil in the country. The urban gaps in the city morphology, inherited as a result of unfinished modernization of Skopje during Yugoslavia, mostly as a consequence of their privatization after the 90s, became target to urban crimes such as Skopje 2014. Instead of proper accommodation of free public program, open spaces and more greenery, new buildings and sculptures were erected, suffocating the urban tissue and unfortunately, slowly become the new silhouette of the city.

The many changes that occurred in a rather short period of time, failed to respond to the social, economic and urban segments of the city.

This mission also targeted a great part of the built heritage from the period of Yugoslavia as well, and with the changes that have been made, many of the buildings in Socialist architectural style were hidden behind and covered with neo-classical facades in a radical makeover.

These phases of Skopje 2014 illustrate that Skopje has undergone processes of radical transformation that are not only institutional, social or political, but ones that have been affecting the people and the built environment as well.

The reshaping of the city did not take into consideration the visions of social organization for communal living that were developed throughout city planning in Socialist Yugoslavia. Many of the inherited buildings remained under the mercy of the politics, not treated properly, and many of them punished to lose their true value and beauty and many more left to decay.

The memory of modern Skopje seems like slowly vanishing in the process of what is seems to be a backward flux of its urban development.

City flux in the case of Skopje 2014 can be described as an attempt to re-cast a national profile, affecting public space, built heritage, social and cultural life, without any awareness of the gap between nationalistic theory and moreover, the desperate economic realities.