

**KATERINA MOJANCHEVSKA**

PhD student at ISS, The Hague, The Netherlands

**MEINE PIETER VAN DIJK**

Professor of urban management at ISS, The Hague, The Netherlands

**'A FUTURE OF THE PAST'**

**Disjuncture between urban and cultural policy planners in the city of Skopje**

## **ABSTRACT**

In 1993, the city of Antwerp was inaugurated a European Capital of Culture, following Athens, Florence, Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris, Glasgow, Dublin and Madrid. Unlike other cities which simply sought on providing a series of cultural events, in Antwerp the intention was to challenge the use of culture as a tool for developing tourism, or for broader instrumental objectives such as urban regeneration. "*A future of the past*", Antwerp's 12 month programme emphasized the multicultural environment of the city and intended not to glorify but rather to unravel areas of tension and threat to social cohesion posed by the rise of the nationalistic political movement.

Twenty years later, within a different political and economical, but yet, multicultural context, a similar question is posed for the urban regeneration practices in the capital of Macedonia, the city of Skopje. Skopje and its main metropolitan area is subject of urban re-imagining which has articulated abundant critical discussions within the urban and cultural arena. The government-run project titled "SKOPJE 2014" aims to alter the city center by constructing administrative buildings, commercial spaces and baroque style cultural institutions, dozens of monuments, fountains, bridges and sculptures.

What is the 'future of the representational past' objectified in the public space in Skopje in economical terms? Does the spatial regeneration which have been undertaken help overcome barriers to social inclusion and combat threats to community well being? Does cultural renaissance celebrate local distinctiveness and the multicultural composition of the city?

The paper will look at these questions from a viewpoint of the economical, social and cultural facet of the project, thus challenging the pragmatic application of multiculturalism in urban policy. Finally, the paper will question whether Europe besides a Cultural Capital needs an annual example of a successful multicultural city initiative.

Key words: urban revitalization, culture, multicultural city, South-Eastern Europe

## **INTRODUCTION**

In 1993, the city of Antwerp, was inaugurated a European Capital of Culture, following Athens, Florence, Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris, Glasgow, Dublin and Madrid. Unlike many other cities which simply sought to provide a series of cultural events, in Antwerp the intention was to challenge this approach of cultural events where prominence is given to political, economic or religious objectives; or as a tool for developing tourism or broader instrumental objectives such as urban regeneration. "A future of the past", Antwerp's 12 month cultural programme emphasized the multicultural environment of the city. It intended not to glorify the city but rather sought to unravel areas of tension and threat to social cohesion posed by the rise of the extremely nationalistic Vlaams Blok' and to provide a space for critical debate. While there is no inevitable link between widening access and diminishing quality, there is a link between vibrant, confident, successful communities and access to cultural expression. There is a link between democratic vitality and creative approaches to problem solving. And there is a link between urban renewal and cultural activity (Wood and Landry, 2008, pp.25-35).

The European Cultural Capital of Culture, as numerous other programmes, has largely been used as a tool for city marketing and identity renewal, executed more or less successfully by the cities inaugurated with the title. The initiative has put a strong emphasis on cities as products and their capacities to understand, develop and modify city structures, icons, myths, collective memory. Their materialization in city public spaces and neighbourhoods has been an important part of the contemporary city cultural capital (Dragičević-Šešić, 2007, p.39). Despite many obstacles, cities have been keen to invest large sums of money and energy into organising events; to launch long-term cultural development plans; to attract visitors from inside the country and abroad; to restore, transform or build new cultural and other heritage and challenge innovative ways of thinking about their own significance and future.

Within this perspective, a conjuncture among urban development strategies and cultural development strategies holds the potential to propagate new utopias and public policies leading to prosperity. As Dragičević-Šešić (2007, p.41) notes, imagination and entrepreneurialism is all that cities need to restore the utopian myth of their creation.

Almost 20 years later, in a different political and economic but yet, similar multicultural context, the same question is posed for the urban regeneration practices of the city of Skopje. The city and its central area are subject to urban reimagining which has articulated abundant critical discussions within the urban and cultural arena. The government-run project titled "Skopje 2014" ('SK2014') deems to alter the city center building new administrative offices, commercial spaces, cultural institutions, monuments and sculptures in public space with divergent symbolic meanings.

Selective parts of the history of the Macedonian nation since ancient times are re-interpreted and re-accommodated within the public space with the intention to support two strategic elements of the process of building national identity: the appropriation of the glorified past and the distinction from the "Other". Meanwhile, the ethnic composition of the country and the city is changing compelling different urban realm and demanding representational space for other's "right to the city".

Therefore, what is the "future of the representational past" objectified in the public space in Skopje? Does spatial regeneration which has been undertaken help overcome barriers to social

inclusion, combat threats to community well being and encourage sustainability? Does the promoted cultural renaissance celebrate local distinctiveness and multicultural composition of the community?

The paper argues that the monumentalization of historical narratives in the public space and culture creates new “national” ethnic identity of the city contributing to further ethnicization of community memory. If further supported, it threatens to create cultural-spatial enclaves with distinct mono-ethnic identity markers. Moreover, the economic role of culture in the current urban city policy is actually supporting the construction industry rather than the community, the citizens and cultural activities. The attempts to reconstruct specific and authentic city identity bears the danger of catalyzing the segregation and dividedness of the city while at the same time set an opportunity for academics, urbanists and cultural planners to reaffirm their critical position in the policy fora.

## MAKING CAPITAL IN CULTURE

Culture and its manifestation in the public space play a key role in the city life, becoming a privileged element in promoting territorial cohesion. It thus becomes possible to think of public space and its cultural framing as an element able to promote continuity and order within the territory; but also having a natural ability to create and maintain strong local centrality, environmental quality, economic competitiveness and sense of citizenship (Borja, 2003) (Pinto et al., 2010, p.1).

Claiming social space and being seen in public becomes a way for social groups to legitimize their right to belong in a society. Because public spaces can be used by everyone, they are frequently considered contested spaces; places where opposition, confrontation, resistance and subversion can be played out over “the right to space” (Mitchell, 1995, 2003). These contestations may involve people from a range of social groups based on gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, (dis)ability, social class and so on (Valentine, 1996; Malone, 2002). They may centre on the different meanings attached to different spaces, or draw on deeper struggles about social representations, or collective myths (Cresswell, 1996) (according to Holland et al., 2007, p.1).

The demand for equality and cultural diversity, in practice, often results in greater segregation and differentiation. These unexpected effects are combined with the dimension of antagonism in the “Us and Them”. And this polarisation may be vividly observed in South-Eastern Europe's post-transitional societies. There, the role of culture is shaping the relationships between individuals and groups, in order to build common sense has many times been challenged by the construction, representation and reinterpretation of historical narratives within group identities. Although this subject has received substantial interest in the educational system and the media (Djerić, 2008; Stojanović, 2008 according to Dragičević-Šešić, 2011, p.32), it has not been adequately researched within public cultural and urban policies.

## TERRITORIALITY AND NATIONALITY: CULTURAL SPACES IN (POST-) TRANSITIONAL SOCIETIES

In South-Eastern Europe, cultural spaces have usually been structured as national (or ethnic), marked with the national language, cultural values, memories, etc; and were territorially defined by a majority national culture and a number of minority ethnic cultures (Švob-Đokić, 2011, p.115). In such context, intercultural encounters were supported, even forced with language policies, mediatisation of culture, collaboration projects etc. Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the new independent Balkan countries, among which Macedonia, turned towards their own collective memories, initiated internal cultural differentiation within the national cultures and national states and re-interpreted the relations among majority and minority ethnic groups. As a result, the countries faced a new reality of ethnic division, conflicts and attempts to enhance tolerance for diversity and multiculturalism (ibid).

Apart from the efforts and resources invested in building multicultural countries in the Balkan, Bauböck (2002, p.13) reminds us of important multiculturalism backlash, avoiding to deal with changing of the established dominant conceptions of nationhood which acquire minorities to be fully assimilated. Bauböck (2002) problematizes the belief of historical and often illusional depth of a national identity which emerges in a process of selective view of history as the past of a present nation state. In his view, it is questionable whether citizens must see themselves as sharing a common future and thus be willing to make sacrifices, however, it is impossible to imagine a common democratic future without also sharing the past (Bauböck, 1998) (ibid.). Hence, deconstructing national history does not provide an answer to the real problem. The past should not be a simple historical narrative of national glories from which all atrocities have been purged. On contrary, public remembrance of past crimes (or injustice, discrimination etc.), especially those committed against ethnic and religious minorities is an essential condition for tolerance and respect among diverse communities.

Managing a context where minorities do not share a common past confirmed the importance of studies of memory politics in understanding the political, social, cultural and urban development of cities in SEE. The cultural policies of the cities and states in SEE refused to directly deal with issues of memory politics, and especially in their relation to urban policy. As an effect, destruction, removal or neglecting of the “memory of the other” in re-sharing collective identities (Dragičević-Šešić, 2011, p.32) have been severely supported in cities’ public policies. Dragičević-Šešić (2011) outlines the following major instruments used in this manner:

- The creation or representation of certain types of narratives, as for example: museum collections, translations, cultural production etc;
- The renaming of institutions, streets, parks and other public spaces;
- The creation of new types of festivities and celebrations;
- The re-appropriation of institutions, sites and even destruction of “dangerous” memories;
- A monument building or removing and a policy toward memory spaces;
- Burial and commemorative policies;
- Governmental decisions regarding the national symbols and other markers of national identity (ibid.).

Apparently, these policy tools are closely linked to city urban policy. Certain dramatic events in the society can galvanize group feelings and increase the level of group identification (Brubaker, 2004, p.11) and in the case of the city of Skopje, it is precisely the project SK2014

that electrified the academia and the public, and divided the citizens along ethnic and religious marker, political affiliation and social status.

## CAN THE PROJECT “SK2014” BE FRAMED AND CODED TO HAVE AN ETHNIC CONFLICT DIMENSION?

A situation, process or act, becomes ethnic through the meanings attributed to it by the actors, politicians, media, researchers. In such way, a situation, process or act is framed and narratively encoded, so this act is not interpreted, but rather constituted as ethnic. This may not reflect the feelings of the actors in the specific situation, process or act but it can shape subsequent experience and increase the level of group identification. Therefore, struggles over interpretative framing and narrative encoding are present and fierce among political elites and cultural-political entrepreneurs. How conflicts are seen, interpreted and represented significantly depends on prevailing interpretative frames (Brubaker, 2004, p.17). Therefore, the use of mono-ethnic interpretative frames and symbolic meaning of SK2014 can spur mere group differentiation and identification rationalised only by ethnic codes.

Brubaker (2004, p.17) pinpoints to the cognitive dimension of ethnicity. Ethnicity, race and nationhood are ways of perceiving, interpreting and representing the social world. Therefore, they are not things in the world but perspectives on the world. It includes ethicized way of seeing (and ignoring) of construing (and misconstruing), of inferring (and mis-inferring), of remembering (and forgetting). Cynical use of ethnic framing to mask the pursuit of clique interests can alert us to the risk of over-ethicized interpretation and “elite manipulation” view of politicised ethnicity (Brubaker, 1998) (ibid.). Within these discussions, SK2014 has been contested to have the potential to spur ethnic conflict in the country and introduce new political reality in the region.

## SKOPJE BEFORE “SK2014”

The city of Skopje is a multicultural hub where diverse cultural needs, habits and interest of different ethno-cultural groups intersect. As a capital, diverse political, economical and cultural interests collide. Situated along the banks of the river Vardar with an area of 1.818 square kilometres, it has a population of 506.926 inhabitants with a composition of 66.75% of Macedonians, 20.49% of Albanians, 4.63% of Roma, 2.82% of Serbs, 1.7% of Turks and the rest of Vlachs, Bosnians and others (according to the last official Census in 2002<sup>1</sup>) and is divided into ten (10) Municipalities governed by the administration of the city of Skopje. The minorities are represented with more than 50% in three municipalities, in two municipalities the minority is Albanian and in the third municipality the minority population is Roma.

The city of Skopje has always been the cross-road between the West and the East. Hence, the urban planning of the city of Skopje in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was led by the idea to create unity among the dialectic duo of the (Christian) “Occident” and the Muslim “Orient”.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/knigaXIII.pdf>

When the state gained independence in 1991, the city of Skopje has undertaken projects which reinvested efforts in the question of the Macedonian identity. The search and the construction of such an identity become a major target for the politicians and the urbanists. Within this process, two strategic elements were used: legitimization by establishing a relation with the distant and glorious past and by clear distinction from the “Others” (Mijalkovič and Urbanek, 2011: 9). Symbols and 'identity markers' played crucial role in constructing the imaginary of the new communities (new churches and crosses on mountain peaks, new mosques and monuments), which defined and marked territories, making cultural presence being felt.

In 2001, a short inter-ethnic violent conflict occurred in Macedonia. Para-military organisation of ethnic Albanians stood up for greater rights of the ethnic minorities in the country while the Macedonian Government considered it to be an attempt for “Greater Albania” where the western part of the country including part of the territory of Skopje would belong. In 2002, after the ethnic conflict, a 77 meters high cross was erected on the mountain of Vodno (above Skopje) which can be clearly seen from each side of the city. As a reaction, several years later, the monument of Skenderbeg, an Albanian historical figure was placed in the Old Bazaar, on the left bank of the river Vardar (mainly inhabited by Albanians, Turks and Roma population), facing towards the Cross on Vodno.

In 2005, with the new territorial organization of the country (as required by the Ohrid Framework Agreement<sup>2</sup> ('OFA') which ended the violent conflict), a rural neighboring community was appended to the territory of Skopje inducing changes in the physical and demographic structure of the city. With the new territorial organization, the city of Skopje experienced a rise of the percentage of ethnic Albanians and having more than 20 percentages of Albanian ethnic minority group required that Albanian language is used as second official language in the capital. The territorial borders of two ethnically mixed municipalities gravitating around the urban core and the river Vardar were reorganized producing more or less ethnically divided spaces in the urban core. In the same time, OFA introduced a process of decentralization which authorized more power on local and regional level structures e.g. cities and municipalities, and in such way transferred the negotiation of ethnic and cultural differences on local level, intending to rationalize them on personal level and therefore, this process was expected to decrease the misunderstandings related to ethnic belonging. In spite of this initiative, in 2010 the state centralized and fortified its presence in the central area of the capital.

## THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY OF SKOPJE – THE UTOPIA OF OPEN CITY AND NEW URBAN PLANNING

In 1963, Skopje was hit by an earthquake that destroyed 70% of the city urban core. In an international call governed by UN, a team of renowned urbanists led the plan for rebuilding of Skopje symbolizing brotherhood and unity in Cold War times and pervasive dividedness in the world. The proposed plan was an opportunity to rationalize the city structure, to develop the private sector and to create new city center as an essence of an open city. The Japanese architect Kenzo Tange focused on the river bank and intended to change its historical

---

<sup>2</sup> Framework Agreement, 13 August 2001; signed in Ohrid, Macedonia.

omnipotence as ethnic city border line. Gaining different public functions, this area was intended to be a shared space (recreational area, park, sport and cultural facilities), a unifying element on both banks of the river Vardar. Accompanied by diverse residential areas, the plan was to confront the ethnic segregation of the city. However, the different ethnic groups opposed the strategy of homogenization of residential types. While the majority of Macedonians moved to the northern part of the city, part of the Albanian and Roma population refused to move away from their places of worship. It was expected that the process of aculturalization and change of habits through education and employment, would act as integrating force, bringing the different cultures closer. However, this never happened. Relatively unimportant details, as colors, bricks and the alphabet, became ethnic markers of the residential areas and made the nucleus center a buffer zone in a divided city (Mijalkovič and Urbanek, 2011, pp.16-32).

After the independence in 1991, urban planning was non-existent in the city of Skopje for almost two decades (Mijalkovič and Urbanek, 2011, p.9). The general urban plan of Skopje set after the earthquake was modified under the compelling forces of migration and transition, increasing fragmentation of the urban core, privatization and commercialization of public space, and new trends of identity politics and representation of history in public space. The nucleus center along both river banks which troubled urbanists for two decades in 2009 was a subject of a new urban planning initiated by a conservative government. Suddenly, the urban planning was about creating an identity based on a range of modern myths, as the legacy of the Alexander the Great, the discord with the Ottomans influence and under commercialization forces (ibid, p.7). In the view of many urbanists and professionals (among them also Mijalkovič and Urbanek), the need to create a distinct identity and fulfillment of the Europeanization of the city implied the risk of catalyzing division and inner rupture of the city.

The new central area plan includes building of commercial buildings and hotels, governmental administrative offices and institutions, museums and cultural spaces (celebrating Macedonian national struggle for independency and commemoration of the victims of the Communism), a triumphal arch and hundred monuments of Macedonian historical and cultural figures and public statues. Prominence is given to a 30m high statues of Alexander the Great and his father Philip II. Immediate reactions followed, a citizen`s platform and critical discourse under the auspices of First Architectural Brigade (students in architecture)<sup>3</sup> and “Ploštad Sloboda” (a civil association) was provoked which culminated in public clash in March 2009 among supporters and opponents of the project exemplifying the dividedness of the society. The project was announced to cost 80 million Euro. However, according to (realistic) projections of the oppositional parties and the media, they exceed 200 million Euro<sup>4</sup>.

In the current debates, it is the style and material that is disputed, rather than the vision of the geopolitical role of Skopje, the participation of the public and the functionality of the components of the plan, all of which are of secondary concern.

## THE REPRESENTATIONAL PAST IN “SK2014” AND ITS FUTURE

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://pab.blog.mk/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cafebabel.co.uk/article/38503/macedonia-skopje-2014-history-obsession-authority.html>

Under the pressure of frustrations related to the national identity (the name dispute with Greece, the denied autonomy of the Macedonia church by Serbia and the dispute with Bulgaria over the specificity of the language) and the pressure toward Europeanization, the Macedonian state initiated new nationalistic ideology. In the current moment of nation-building, the national policy claims succession rights from ancient past and claims that the Macedonian nation has followed as an encounter among ancient Macedonians who have always lived in these territories and the newly Slavic tribes fully disregarding the contribution by other ethnic groups in the history-making and neglecting their current position.

Within the turmoil, the Skopje airport was renamed into “Alexander the Great”, the main highway heading north-south of the country towards Greece known in socialistic times as “Brotherhood and unity” was renamed into Alexander of Macedon while the monuments and the heritage from the previous socialistic system and Ottoman times became “dissonant heritage” linked to the “memory of the other” (Dragičević-Šešić, 2011, p.35), an identity symbol of one group which instigated the dominant today to forget it, neglect or destroy.

The current debate of the role of culture, art and architecture in SK2014 can only be simplified in what Chin (1992, p.1) describes as: “...politics, power and the ways in which culture is embedded into the social matrix...representation, people’s feeling of infringement (or oppression) and exclusion”. The reason why the project’s critics are so painful is that they strike at the very heart of who people think they are.

The project intervenes into a nation-state building process that itself is rooted in negotiating political realities with the neighbouring counties and an understanding of multiculturalism as constitutional category acknowledged after the events in 2001. The project promotes the past and the tradition in a way that Nebojša Vilić, an art historian, illustrates as only ‘a shelter for the fearfulness, uncreative and close-minded spirit toward risky changes – a safe walk on the way over established and accepted values (Vilić, 2010, pp.17-18). Art historians, architects and citizens interpreted these ideas as a pathological resurrection of the past and creation of a new “reality and truth” which will propagate the supremacy of one ideology over another (the Demo-Christian over democratic ideology). The participants of Forum-Skopje 2009 - a meeting of architects, artists, cultural workers, sociologists, philosophers, theoreticians and city planners which took place in Skopje concluded that there is a lack of a structured institutional discussion concerning the semantics and symbolic meaning of the project’s elements. Moreover, in their view, there is unimaginative urban plan where churches and contemporary kitsch architecture are promoted as identity milestones. The conclusion of the Forum was that all ideas concerning city development and branding, hence the means used for their appropriation in public space, should be critically folded and observed in perspective of the spatial, historical and social context of the city<sup>5</sup>.

In economic terms, there are concerns how the new public infrastructure which is depending on state budget can be fully maintained in the future. Macedonia in the last 20 years is persistently fighting with high levels of unemployment, impoverishment of the citizens and decrease of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). According to the State Statistical Office data, in 2011, 31.6 percent of the labour competent person was unemployed<sup>6</sup>, the percentage of poor

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.forumskopje.com/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2012/2.1.12.17.pdf>



people was 30.4<sup>7</sup> while the growth rate of GDP in the first quarter of 2012 was -1.4 percent<sup>8</sup>. Within such economic context, it seems inconsistent and a paradox to allocate 9.4 million Euro for one monument and the surrounding fountain and at the same time allocate around 10 million Euro for increasing the competitiveness of the small and medium-sized enterprises in the country and 15 million Euro to build 76 local roads, 176 km long.

In contrast, the house of Mother Theresa, build as part of SK2014 and opened in January 2009 had more visitors in the first year than any other museum in Macedonia. Such figure encourages the Government to continue the paved way despite criticism and economic odds. Still, it is difficult to imagine the future of the new elements of urban and cultural life, their physical maintenance and diverse programming. The created mono-cultural landscape would need to evolve to reflect the changed social landscape.

## CULTURAL RENAISSANCE, LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS AND MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

The project “SK2014” is conceived as an expression of amateurism, de-politization and commercialization (Mijalkovič and Urbanek, 2011, p.76). In Macedonia, as in other newly created nation states of the former Yugoslavia, the politics of memory served to destroy all traces of the socialistic past, to remove “the memory of the other” or re-contextualize it, so their original meaning was lost and new interpretation related to the glorified past of the dominant group added. Dragičević-Šešić (2011, p.35) describes this as strategy of appropriation. Besides this practice, she notes the use of annihilation strategy were through destruction of elements which are “threatening and destroying” the national identity, a “spontaneous” cleansing of the territory is achieved. Correspondingly, the cultural heritage, the identity marks from the past and the distinctiveness of the communities, especially in relation, to the multiethnic character of the country was subject to re-thinking and re-shaping within the current memory politics.

In the first years of independency, the socialistic organisation of urban and cultural life remained under the tutorship of the state where expressions incongruent with the official state politics were censored and disciplined. In 2006, the ruling conservative party made clear its intentions to break with these practices of the past. They instead introduced de-politization and amateurism in the urban planning.

De-politization was only declaratively supported. In the local couloirs, certain authors closely linked to the ruling party were awarded with opportunity to take part in the project and their honoraria were never transparently published.

A mere example of the amateurism in the thematic layout is the “Sculpture project”. Commissioned by the Ministry of Culture in 2008, it intends to situate more than 50 bronze and stone sculptures in the city center in 500 meters radius, giving space to each citizen who wanted to express his/her talent, ability and creativity to propose a theme, a figure and a location, so to participate in the new outlook of the city. Such decision was welcomed by critics as code noise and disorientation of cultural messages of the city center.

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2012/4.1.12.50.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2012/3.1.12.04.pdf>

The current ideological and instrumental view on culture, the domination of the ethnic majority and the exclusion of different minorities from the public sphere, the aggressive surveillance and expected congruity and subjugation to the governing parties will have strong cultural and psycho-social effects on the new image of Skopje; a new image build upon the conservative ideology that the current government promotes (Vilić, 2010, p.19). He further elaborates that the cultural practice in Skopje is a “schizophrenic wandering between an instrumentalized past, a politicized present and a future which is lacking creative ideas”.

Regrettably, this element of SK2014 was the only opportunity for citizens to participate in negotiating public space design. Despite the empowering participatory democracy it strived to promote, it only endowed declaratory citizen`s participation.

Within the project, the public functions are subjected to consumerism by citizens or visitors and commercialization of the city as a product and spectacle encouraged. The city branding approach for increased visibility on the regional and/or global scene is promoted by imitation, rather than by its authentic renaissance look, local contemporary creativity and celebrating multiculturalism. Today, the urban center reconstruction would need to testify for the European, Christian and bourgeois city Skopje had never been and repudiate his oriental, Islamic past, neglecting the local distinctiveness and oriental charm, missing the opportunity to build an image of inclusive city of difference.

## URBAN SPACE AS INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTER OR CULTURAL-SPATIAL ENCLAVE

One of the crucial questions concerning the impact of SK2014 relates to the future of the city. Therefore, does the undertaken spatial regeneration help local urban governance and citizens to overcome barriers to social inclusion, combat threats to community well-being and encourage sustainability of the city? Within the social dimension of the project, arguments related to Skopje as an “ethno-nationally divided city” or specialisations of ethnical conflict are gaining importance.

In the ethno-national divisions in Skopje, language and religion have been the main “ethnic” markers. There are city areas where concentration of single ethnic group is persistent, as there are mainly Macedonian and mainly Albanian parts of the city, but not an ethnically-divided city *per se*.

Cities and the public space are observed as “the best places where mechanisms and practices leading toward multicultural society in the context of liberal democracy can be developed” (Tatjer, 2004, p.248-249). Tatjer (2004) assigns such an important role to the cities in the prospect of their capacity to accommodate cultural difference and facilitating coexistence among different ethno-cultural groups, both posing a driving force for cities` social and economical development. Moreover, in her views, cities can create opportunities and mechanisms for minority groups to address difficulties that the state has not foreseen and allow existence of sense of belonging that does not clash with different cultural identities, while the state can provide civil political norms unrelated to cultural identity. However, she argues and reminds us not to idealise the capacity or to propose a panacea for the conflicts that the presence of ethnical diversity can create in the society (ibid).

As in other cases, the re-imagining of the city of Skopje rooted in mono-cultural symbols is an expression of fear and aversion, fear of change, particularly, of the changing ethnic composition of the neighbourhood. Sandercock (2000, p.15) argues such tendencies in the world would only grow, increasingly becoming constitutive elements of planning practice in cities of difference.

If minority ethnic groups feel under-represented in SK2014 and interpret it as marking territories within the shared public space, while there is a tendency for spatial clustering, can the process escalate in development of cultural-spatial enclaves within Skopje?

Peter Marcuse (2001, p.3) defines enclave as “an area of spatial concentration in which members of a particular population group, self-defined by ethnicity or religion or otherwise, congregate (meaning voluntary coming together) as a means of protecting and enhancing their economic, social, political and/or cultural development”. In further, he makes a clear distinction among three ideal types of divisions - by culture, by functional economic role, and by position in the hierarchy of power. Cultural divisions are based on ethnicity, by country or nationality or tribe of origin or parentage or descent, by religion or belief, by life-style and not on differences in relationship to economic production or on relationships of power. Divisions by functional role are the result of economic logic, are essentially independent of cultural differences, and do not (at least essentially--status differentiates may of course arise out of functional differences) denote relations of superiority or inferiority to other functions, simply differences. Differences in hierarchical status reflect and reinforce relationships of power, of domination, exploitation, state service. These three divisions both overlap and contradict each other; their intertwining is one of the fascinations of the history of cities. He suggests that: “Divisions, clustering, by status, reflecting and reinforcing hierarchical relationships of power are unacceptable from a public policy point of view, and the appropriate targets of state prohibition; cultural or social clusters that do not reinforce such relationships of power are not”.

Within this spirit, claiming citizen’s right to preserve their group content based on territorial autonomy (cultural-spatial enclave) are being rationalized. The establishment of cultural-spatial enclaves assigned to particular ethno-cultural groups within the cities if encouraged is challenging the social cohesion and questioning the trust among citizens and communities. Therefore can we foresee the aftermaths of such actions, moreover, can we foresee if such circumstances can later induce clustering by status, reflecting and reinforcing hierarchical relationships of power.

According to the concept of continuum among culture-ethnicity-territory, other authors (Margulies, NA) suggest that for the sake of the preservation of cultural diversity, urban theory must either acquiesce or straightforwardly encourage the establishment of carved-out-enclave territories assigned to particular ethnic-cultural groupings within the cities. Disturbing a culture from its ethnic and territorial basis may risk the dismantling and abolition of that culture. Ethical dilemmas boldly emerge from this analysis, as where do we draw the line between diversity and segregation, between particularism and racialism?

Territorial strategies of cultural imprinting of public space can result in enhancing divisions of “Us and Them” and create fundament of mono-ethnic identity, strengthening the dividedness of the city. Creating of shared space with integrative focus can dismantle stereotypical notions

that Macedonians and Albanians cannot live in the same building, go to same schools, share cultural events and do something jointly for community benefit.

In a city of difference, majority groups need to re-think their past so that it includes the divergent past of all groups who share a common space and therefore, a common future. Shared identity can emerge from a public culture that transforms itself in response to diversity. Shared identities cannot be fixed in their cultural and historical content but should be self-transformative. In Brubaker's (2004, pp.5-11) view, the process of self-transformation of collective identities toward a more pluralistic outlook is needed because national identity if connected with majority historical glories cannot be shared. He further argues that it is essential to replace identity with less congested terms, as: identification and categorization, self-understanding and social location, commonality and connectedness if shared future among different ethnic groups is negotiated. Furthermore, he calls social analysts to rethink the concept of ethnicity, race and nation in processual, relational, eventful, dynamic terms rather in discrete, concrete, tangible and bounded groups; in practical categories, cultural idioms, discursive frames, organisational routines, institutional forms and political projects. Ethnicization and nationalization should therefore be viewed as political, sociological, cultural and psychological processes.

The development of spatial-cultural enclaves in Skopje, if strengthened by ethnic borders, would intensify the internal cultural differentiation among the ethnic groups and would embed them in their own cultural and historical content. Beneficiary of such processes can be the conservative political agendas sustaining power based on identity and ethnic-based policies.

## LESSONS FROM THE "RIGHT TO THE CITY" MOVEMENT

The city of Skopje with its multifaceted image and multi-layered symbolic spaces is a true inspiration for urbanists and analysts. The national history and the urban image of the city and their appropriation into public space are too important to only be guided by politicians. Although it is obvious that SK2014 is more a political, than an urban revitalization and cultural project, its implications to the cultural, social and urban conceptualization of city are evident. Hence posing questions that relate to the basis of the fragmented urban planning of Skopje, the role of conflict into shaping public space and the power of citizens to be active interpreters rather than passive consumers are needed, although not welcome in the current policy discourse.

In similar contexts, the struggle over spatial justice and/or right to the city inspired urban-based socio-spatial movement. Henri Lefebvre coined the slogan "right to the city" in the 1968 student's protests as: right to information, the right to use multiple services, the right of users to make known their ideas on the space, the right to use the center (Lefebvre, 1991, p.34 according to Marcuse, 2009, pp.189-192). It is a claim that provokes on who should have the benefit of the city and what kind of a city it would be (ibid.). It is a moral claim based on the fundamental principles "of justice, of ethics, of morality, of virtue, of the good". "Right to" should not be understood as a legal concept, and not just right to public space or right to public information and access; but collectivity of rights, a right to totality, a complexity, a belonging to a single whole. Conceiving the city, Lefebvre thinks not of the conventional city, but rather of a

place in urban society where full development of human potential and capabilities is endorsed, where justice, equity, and diversity is recognized.

Soja (2010) rightly pointed to the importance of spatial justice. This is a new critical discourse on geography of social justice which has begun beyond academic realm and into social and political practice, influencing the identity, cohesion and strategic determinants of the urban movements. Within the concept, justice is specifically and inherently special, and not mere geographical dimension for social justice, a material dimension; “a generative, explanatory and causal force in and of itself.” However, spatial strategies should not remain within the monopoly of progressive forces as they can be used to reinforce spatial structures of social control, cultural oppression and political-economic advantage.

## CONCLUSION

In cities of differences, a strategy for integrated urban and cultural development is an essential learning mechanism. Facilitation of integration at city level, development of politics of linkage among cultural resources, economic potential, educational infrastructure and urban sites is vital so to improve social interaction and intercultural sociability and to have multiplying effects.

The following is important learning experience from the urban revitalization practices of the city of Skopje, largely noted by Mijalkovič and Urbanek (2011, pp.99-103):

- There is a need to consider the functional, spatial and aesthetic needs of contemporary city life, despite the fact that important landmarks of the past have been destroyed. It is naive to believe that their reconstruction would bring back the authenticity of the city;
- The re-imaged reconstruction should not be a shallow copy of the original but rather a visionary approach toward function, style, and contemporary needs of citizens raised from development of urban life;
- The inclusion of the public and the expert opinion is essential in a magna project of revitalization, as per creating a balance among the dominant narratives impelled by the structures of power and the different marginal voices on the question - which and how historical and cultural narratives should be represented in public space?;
- Urban design in a divided city has to be flexible and open to different connotations. It has to make people to be aware of and be confronted with the presence of “others” and then search for new ways of joined communication;
- There should be established practices of construction based on research and discussion. In the case of cities of difference this must include debate on national identity building process, geo-political development of the city, rethinking of planning practices, implementation of new public functions and residential areas;
- Openness and uncertainty to be encouraged rather than fixed meanings and the power of last word to prevail in relation to interpretation of historical and cultural narratives;
- Academic input into the debate of national narratives of the city and contribution by other sectors, as performing arts, visual arts, cultural policy into situating history in public space should not only be supported declaratory, but critically included in the strategic design of urban revitalization projects;

- Decision on the role of the city in the regional and European context (under the migration forces, the changing city borders, advantages in cultural sense) should be made as part of the project, consciously and mature;
- In cities of difference, the use of conflict and places of inevitable cultural encounter should be a strategy to counter-fight the strategy of avoidance (for example: create space with mix of buildings with different functions) where transformation in the public space can be achieved crossing fix borders of “Us and Them”.

Urban planning is still possible and needed in the case of the city of Skopje. It should be re-conceptualized to be transparent, systematic and inter-related as well as open to the critical public and to input from international opinions on the future of the city and its developmental potentials, all which are constitutive elements of urban policy based on integration.

The application of diversity in urban management requires development of a model of positive urban vision of diversity within unity that resolves ethical dilemmas. Expanding leadership grouping who share common goals helps developing leadership and builds civic capacity.

Within the context, Multicultural Initiative Price can be inspiring tool for cities as Skopje (divided cities in Europe as still are Mostar, Mitrovica, Nicosia). It can stimulate a process of city profiling based on contemporary values and resources which in this region is based on multiculturalism (multicultural city where the main “identity mark” of the city is its multiculturalism, as Leicester, Marseille).

According to Bloomfield and Bianchini (2004: 79), socially and culturally mixed areas require innovative and balanced planning to tackle ethnic segregation in the cities. The strategy of creating “soft boundaries” is a policy tool used by several cities in Europe (as Barcelona in the second half of the 1980s) where displacement from regular segregated experience into shared common space within social and cultural interactions happen. In their view, this could be achieved only if at the central of the urban planning and design strategies, a notion of the city as a “network of public spaces and as a system of interconnected parts” exists. Similarly, Amin (2002) stresses the importance of “repeated social encounters of a routine kind and of alternative spaces of “banal transgression” offering new cultural experiences which unsettle fixed identities and relationships (ibid: 80).

How to transform the mono-cultural atmosphere of the city center? By using cultural infrastructure as meeting places; through place marketing, media campaign not undermining the local residents and creating intercultural civic identity and culture, that requires reshaping of collective memory to include the “Other”. The memory of the cities is regularly selective and shaped by personal and group experience, but also public institution, displays and symbols embodied in monuments, sculptures, architectural heritage. Building local plural civic identity and public spheres requires reconnecting the presence of outsiders to the dominant history of the city.

According to Bloomfield and Bianchini (2004: 98), the public symbols need to reflect on this double history of the city, not only in pluralistic additions to the dominant paradigm but also by juxtaposing symbols through montage and parody, performing arts and installations which interact and comment on the multiplicity of the stories. These suggestions could inspire

innovative use of culture in re-imagining the central area of Skopje and instigate further researches in this topic.

## REFERENCES

Bauböck, R., 2002. "Farewell to Multiculturalism? Sharing Values and Identities in Societies of Migration", *JIMI/RIME*, Vol 3(1), pp.1-16.

Bloomfield, J. and Bianchini, F. (2004). *Planning for the intercultural city*, Stroud: Comedia.

Brubaker, R., 2004. *Ethnicity without Groups*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Chin, D., 1992. "Multiculturalism and Its Masks: The Art of Identity Politics". *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Jan, 1992), pp. 1-15.

Dragičević-Šešić, M., 2007. "Culture as a Recourse of City Development". In: N. Švob-Đokić ed. *Cultural transitions in Southeastern Europe. The creative city: Crossing visions and new realities in the region*, Zagreb: Institute for International Relations, pp.39-54.

Dragičević-Šešić, M., 2011. "Cultural policies, identities and monument building in Southeastern Europe". In: A. Milohnić and N. Švob-Đokić eds. *Cultural transitions in Southeastern Europe. Cultural Identity Politics in the (Post-)Transitional Societies*, Zagreb: Institute for International Relations, pp.31-46.

Holland, C., Clark, A., Katz, J. and Peace, M. S., 2007. *Social interactions in urban public places*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

[online] Available at:

<<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/2017-interactions-public-places.pdf>>

[Accessed 20 July 2012].

Marcuse, P., 2009. "From critical urban theory to the right to the city", *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 13:2-3, pp.185-197.

Marcuse, P., 2001. "Enclaves Yes, Ghettos, No: Segregation and the State". Conference paper at International Seminar on Segregation in the City, July 26-28, 2001.

[online] Available at:

<[http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/curp/Marcuse\\_Segregationandthe.pdf](http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/curp/Marcuse_Segregationandthe.pdf)>

[Accessed 20 July 2012].

Margulies, E. H., NA. "The problem of diversity", *Dialog and Urbanism: On Buber, Naess, Spinoza and the Question of Diversity*.

[online] Available at:

<<http://buber.de/material/urban>>

[Accessed 20 July 2012].

Mijalkovič, M. and Urbanek, K., 2011. "Skopje – The World's Bastard, Architecture of the divide City", Skopje: Goten

Pinto, A.J., Remesar, A., Brandão, P. and Nunes da Silva, F., 2010. *Planning Public Spaces*, in: *Networks towards Urban Cohesion 46th ISOCARP Congress 2010*.

[online] Available at:  
<[http://www.isocarp.net/Data/case\\_studies/1798.pdf](http://www.isocarp.net/Data/case_studies/1798.pdf)>  
[Accessed 20 July 2012].

Sandercock, L., 2000. "When Strangers Become Neighbours: Managing Cities of Difference", *Planning Theory & Practice*, Vol 1, No 1 (2000), pp.13-30.

[online] Available at:  
[http://www.eslarp.uiuc.edu/courses/FAA%20391\\_Spring10/Sandercock\\_Strangers.pdf](http://www.eslarp.uiuc.edu/courses/FAA%20391_Spring10/Sandercock_Strangers.pdf)  
[Accessed 20 July 2012].

Soja, E., 2010. Spatializing the urban, Part I, *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 14:6, 629-635.

Švob-Đokić, N., 2011. "Cultural identities in Southeastern Europe – a post-transitional perspective". In: A. Milohnić and N. Švob-Đokić eds. *Cultural transitions in Southeastern Europe. Cultural Identity Politics in the (Post-)Transitional Societies*, Zagreb: Institute for International Relations, pp.113-126.

Tatjer, C.L., 2004. "Multiculturalism in the city: managing diversity", in: P. Wood, ed. *Intercultural city reader*, Stroud: Comedia, pp.248-257.

Vilić, N., 2010. Rape Skopje, Skopje: 359°  
[online] Available at: <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/44902835/04-Siluvajte-Go-Skopje>>  
[Accessed 20 July 2012].

Wood, P. and Landry, C. (2008) *The intercultural city: planning for diversity advantage*, London: Earthscan.

## WEB RESOURCES

'The world is debating whether Skopje is bustard or not', Interview with Milan Mijalkovič, 28.05.2011.

Available at:  
<http://www.novamakedonija.com.mk/NewsDetal.asp?vest=52511956209&id=26&prilog=1&setlzdanie=22291> [Accessed 20 July 2012].

Forum-Skopje 2009, <http://www.forumskopje.com/> [Accessed 20 July 2012].

'Ethic and aesthetics', Interview with Suzana Milevska, 18.03.2010. Available at:  
<http://okno.mk/node/4932> [Accessed 20 July 2012].

<http://www.stat.gov.mk>

<http://pab.blog.mk/>

<http://www.cafebabel.co.uk/article/38503/macedonia-skopje-2014-history-obsession-authority.html>

<http://www.forumskopje.com/>