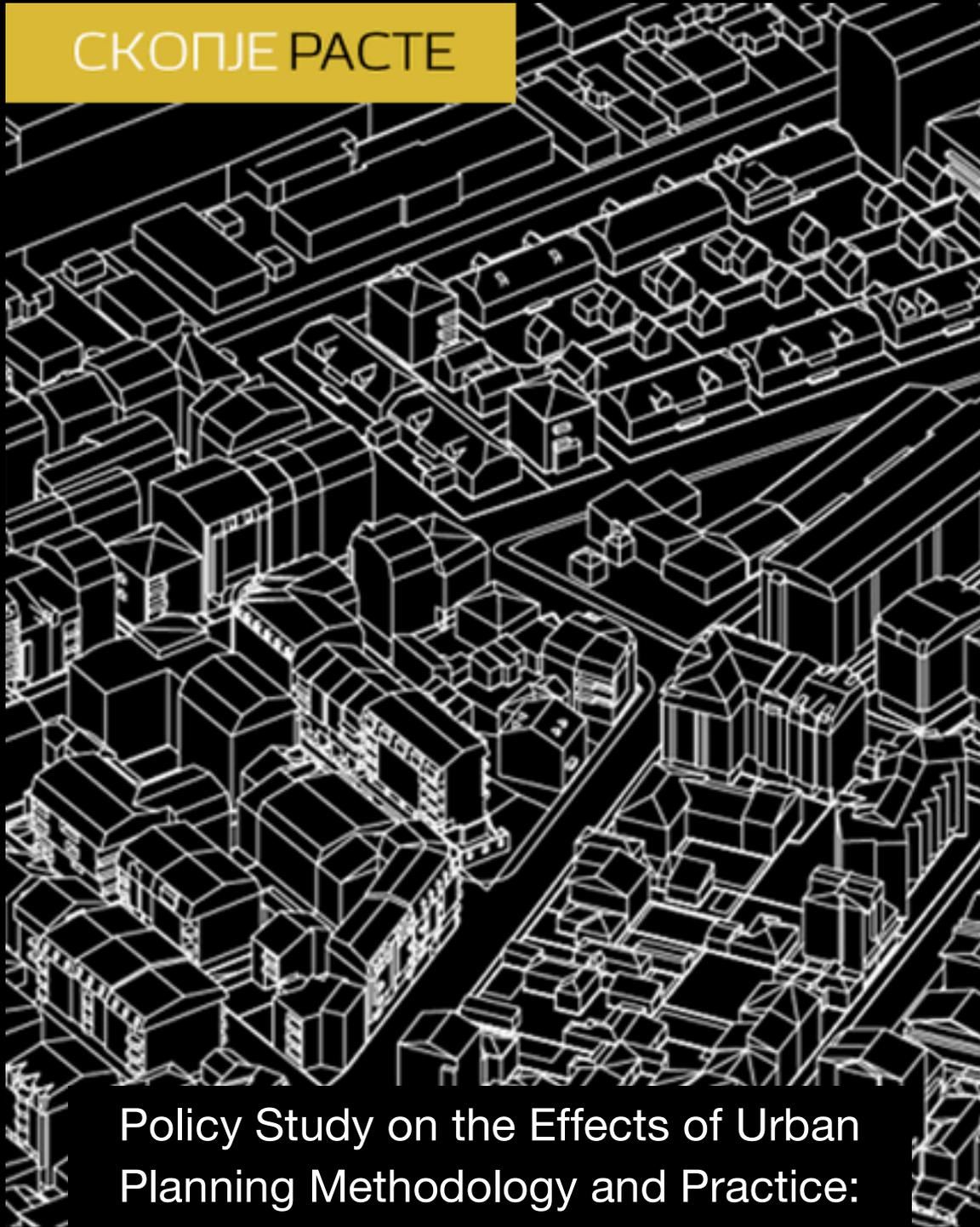


СКОПЈЕ РАСТЕ



Policy Study on the Effects of Urban  
Planning Methodology and Practice:

Case Studies of Debar Maalo and Bunjakovec

A Joint Project by Reactor – Research in Action and Arhitektri

project website: [skopjeraste.mk](http://skopjeraste.mk)

# **POLICY STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF THE URBAN PLANNING METHODOLOGY AND PRACTICE IN SKOPJE**

CASE STUDIES OF DEBAR MAALO AND BUNJAKOVEC

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**Skopje, January 2013**

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## Instead of a Manifesto: In Need of Increased Participation

The inclusion of the broader society into the urban planning process is a necessity rather than an experiment as the architects and urban planners in Macedonia might think. In today's democracies it is essential that citizens have the right to participate in decision-making so as to be able to influence local policies. This is especially essential in urban planning, since it regulates and shapes the spaces that citizens use and in which they live and work. It is therefore no surprise that public participation was explicitly guaranteed with the legal framework on urban planning even in the socialist era and continues to be guaranteed to this day. However, this important opportunity provided to citizens does not always comply with the regulations in practice and unsatisfied citizens are forced to use legal remedies, so it is no surprise that complaints are often raised about the lack of public debate in the urban planning process. As a result, in the last decade the constitutional court annulled at least one detailed urban plan per year due to a lack of public debate<sup>1</sup>.

This example alone is sufficient proof that citizens are invested in this issue and exhaust all available mechanisms for protecting their right to be informed and involved. However, the mechanisms currently in place only formally guarantee participation in the urban planning process. This changes when citizens act in the role of owners or investors, in which case they have mechanisms at their disposal to push for changes in the urban plan on micro level, such as for example, to increase their building area. On the other hand, faced with no other source of direct income apart from construction fees prior to the decentralization introduced in 2005, municipalities in Macedonia also unanimously agreed to the expansion of the city almost at any cost, discarding public interest behind as an obstacle to the planned growth.

In this paper we analyze the consequences that this framework will produce in the long run. By mapping and visualizing the city's growth in two authentic neighborhoods, we argue that this combination significantly favors private above public interest, as local authorities tend to their own needs and those of the investors and fail to address the concerns raised by the citizens. This in return created a model for 'regulated' unsustainability, i.e. an urban planning model that only satisfies individual appetites while intensifies urban problems such as lack of parking and green areas, traffic, pollution, insulation. It is therefore no surprise that majority of citizens' feel that they cannot influence the work of the local authorities, although they would like to be more involved<sup>2</sup>.

The **growth** of the existing urban form is a normal behavior and could not be judged as a negative occurrence of quantitative solution to the spatial needs of the area. But the lack of balance and coherent plan for anticipating problems like deterioration of the existing typology, parking and infrastructure congestion, environmental problems (insolation, green spaces, pollution) and neglect of systematic plan of evacuation in case of catastrophe. The built housing form in DM and BU is a physical proof that the plans and laws could be designed to support the market logic instead of the more humane need for affordable and quality space.

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<sup>1</sup> Constitutional court annual reports, authors own computations; [www.ustavensud.mk](http://www.ustavensud.mk)

<sup>2</sup> Reactor's Study on Civic Engagement, 2012

Furthermore, this paper argues that economic growth, in an information era, does not require physical growth. The digital layer is well integrated into the developed society and can reach better and faster to any point of the city or the world. It has its own economic logic that is much faster or direct than the physical one and needs less resources or physical space. Therefore, we ask the question: *What impact could this have on the spatial needs of the existing urban form?*

This platform could well become a public service within the regular services that the municipalities have on their websites. This is just a beginning in what could be achieved in the intention of bringing the public into the process of planning. The educational aspect is a very important one, as well as the interactive, because it will merge the collective knowledge of the city into an open system like we already know exist on the internet (google maps, open street maps, GIS systems etc). Education of the citizens will be crucial for making the general public aware about their block, neighborhood or the city.

Archiving the DATA is not only a technical procedure for keeping the digital knowledge of the city, but to connect with the society in the most interactive way as possible. In the information area in which we live, there is no single aspect of life that was spared by the aggressive thirst for interaction. The once political or economical powerhouses are papering the cracks over the damage left by the shift of the power from the centralized systems to the individualism. There is no logic in opposing such reality, but to embrace it and make it at the benefit of more cohesive and humane neighborhood.

## Introduction

*“We, European local elected representatives, share the belief that the inhabitants of our towns and cities cannot experience fully their town or city without also being responsible, active and informed citizens. We believe that urban democracy, having for a long time been a school of national democracy for many politicians, can revive the public spirit of our citizens and their appetite for democracy.”* *European Urban Charter (II)*

Urban planning has been one of the most challenging competences transferred to the local government in Macedonia with the decentralization process in 2005.<sup>3</sup> Since then, several revisions of the legal framework have been adopted in order to improve the urban planning process and to make it more transparent and participatory. Municipalities were authorized to manage the construction land on their territories from July 2011.<sup>4</sup> However, the procedures for drafting and adopting the four different types of urban plans – general, detailed, for residential areas and for non-residential areas – are complex, multi-layered and mostly incomprehensible to the citizens whose lives they affect.

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<sup>3</sup> Previously, the competence was within central authorities, namely the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Transport and Communication

<sup>4</sup> With the 2009 amendments to the *Law on Construction Land*

As part of the decentralization process, the capacities of local authorities have been strengthened<sup>5</sup> to address the lack of expertise for implementing the new competences, including in the area of urban planning. While the efficiency in the issuance of building conditions and building permits has increased (over 70% and 90%, respectively), many problems still remain. There is no municipality that has covered all of its territory with urban plans, including the city of Skopje. One third of the municipalities do not have appointed urban planning inspectors<sup>6</sup> authorized to supervise construction activities locally and eliminate the various causes of irregularities. All municipalities have informal settlements for which there is no valid data. Furthermore, although the legal framework for public participation in urban planning has been strengthened,<sup>7</sup> its implementation remains formal and very low on the ladder of participation (de facto remains only informational and not participatory). The weak legislation is further deteriorated with inconsistent implementation and a total of 20 detailed urban plans have been annulled in the last seven years.<sup>8</sup>

In September 2011, the Government adopted the newest triennial Program for the Implementation of the Process of Decentralization (2012-2014) that will focus, *inter alia*, on the increased inclusion of the citizens in the processes of policy development and decision making at the local level. While methods used by municipalities outside Skopje vary<sup>9</sup>, in the City of Skopje citizens rely almost exclusively on announcements posted only on the nearest buildings, almost always a day before the scheduled public debate.

## Why Skopje is Growing

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it became clear that the majority of the world population is living in cities. It is estimated that between 2011 and 2050 the world population will increase by 2.3 billion, increasing from 7.0 billion to 9.3 billion<sup>10</sup>. In Macedonia the situation is even more dramatic. According to the last Census in 2002, 57.8% of the population lives in cities, and Skopje alone host one fifth (20.5%) of the population. On the global level, the population living in urban areas is expected to increase by another 2.6 billion citizens, from 3.6 billion in 2011 to 6.3 billion in 2050. This means that in the next four decades the urban areas of the world are expected to absorb the entire population growth of the planet.

In this sense, to think of the future of the city is certainly to invoke the question of population growth, and consequently, the issue of urban density. Although urban density is usually considered merely as a (empiric) measure tool of the ratio of people inhabiting

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<sup>5</sup> For example a multi-year EU funded project has been implemented (2006-2009) that trained over 1.300 municipal administrations in urban planning (called TRAIN).

<sup>6</sup> *Decentralization in Stagnation*, OSF-Macedonia, 2012; available in Macedonian at: <http://soros.org.mk/dokumenti/monitoring-mkd-2011.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> According to the Law on Spatial and Urban Planning, municipalities are obliged to organize timely open public presentations of the draft urban plans so that local citizens' comments can be incorporated before the plans are adopted.

<sup>8</sup> Constitutional court decisions, available at [www.ustavensud.mk](http://www.ustavensud.mk)

<sup>9</sup> Local media proved the most popular method of informing citizens of the public discussion (72%), followed by the involvement of neighbourhood self-government units (31%), and daily newspapers (27%). Other activities included informal meetings (23%), posters/brochures (15%) and the municipal website (14%) - *OSCE Survey on Decentralization process* (2006-2011), available at: <http://www.osce.org/skopje/87514>

<sup>10</sup> UN Estimates 2011

a certain area, the issue of density is also applicable as an instrument for assessing urban life quality. In this sense, density embodies many figurative, cultural and ideological connotations of the city and its life, which are now being located at the *“intersection of cross-border processes; flows of capital, labour, goods, raw materials, merchants, travellers”*, and as a *“strategic space for the economies and cultures that arose out of these flows and for the housing of power: economic, political and symbolic.”*<sup>11</sup>

It is, however, more and more obvious that the city can no longer be seen as a single idea. Recent conditions of our urban environment prove that *“the city as we know it seems to be dissolving and is being replaced by something for which we lack concepts and images. Spatial transformations have produced a new kind of city for which we have as yet no adequate models of perception and representation”*<sup>12</sup>. As a consequence, the phenomena of the contemporary city are in the centre of interest of a diverse profile of researchers, such as economist, social and cultural scientists, urban planners and certainly architects. Within all of those different disciplines, scholars are trying to unfold the principles of the novel processes that are emerging, and to describe the multiple factors responsible of shaping the dynamic environment called the “contemporary city”.

### *The Geopolitical Context of Skopje*

The wider territory of Central and Eastern Europe is a specific geopolitical context in many ways. It belongs to the countries of the former Eastern Bloc also known as the former socialist states. Much like the societies and cultures that they house, cities in Central and Eastern Europe follow similar but also unique patterns in their formation, urban life, growth, or decline. The region has proven to be a very heterogeneous and exceptionally dynamic context with autonomous political, social and economic characteristics.

*“Through long periods of history, the Central and Eastern European region has been plagued by contested definitions, claims and counter claims to territorial identity and affiliation, and nationalist conflict, as well as frequent use of these to propagate geopolitical and geo-strategic power interests.”*<sup>13</sup>

Almost a quarter of a century ago, the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 marked the beginning of the process of transition in the former communist countries. Shortly after, dramatic transformations of political, economic and social systems not only changed the geopolitical map of Europe, but also affected the urban realm of the cities and consequently, the lives of millions of people. Particularly, *“frequent wars and changing political boundaries, as well as the “relocating” of territory from one empire or state to another, have stunned or distorted urban development, creating real functioning*

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<sup>11</sup> Sassen, S. 2006, *Why Cities Matter*, in Burdett, R., Ichioka, S (Eds) (2006) *Cities: People, Society, Architecture: 10th International Architecture Exhibition - Venice Biennale*, Rizzoli, 27-51

<sup>12</sup> Vockler, K. 2006, *Fragmented Cityscapes*, in Ferguson, F. & urban drift (Eds.) (2006) *Talking Cities: The Micropolitics of Urban Space / Die Mikropolitik des urbanen Raum.*, Birkhäuser Basel, p.38

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton, I. 2005, *Transformation of Cities In Central And Eastern Europe: Towards Globalization*. United Nations University Press, 3-21

*environments of poverty and economic, military and political instability for cities, whose people have had to adjust and readjust to new circumstances.”<sup>14</sup>*

Within the patterns of post-socialist transformation of Macedonian cities, the capital Skopje should be observed as a single case. Following the violent disintegration of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, Republic of Macedonia emerged as an independent state in 1991. Like the other largest cities of the former Yugoslav republics, Skopje was “promoted” from a center of an autonomous republic into a state capital. In the dramatic theatre of the re-born Balkan nation states, it immediately became a symbol of the country’s political and economic power.

However, more than two decades after communism and much like other cities in the former Eastern Bloc countries, Skopje is still in the process of transition. What was expected to be only a passage from one state to another, become itself a state and a lasting condition. Since cities themselves are a spatial embodiment of the societal circumstances - as the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre claimed - Skopje and its recent spatial footprint is closely related to the process of transition from a socialist to a market oriented economy.

The process of post-socialist transition can be explained as a simultaneous transformation of political, economic and social system of the country. It is a gradual process, as it requires establishing new institutions, new organizations, new laws and expecting new behaviours of the various participants in the system.

The political system underwent a transformation that was constitutional and institutional, corresponding to the economic transformation that led to the introduction of new property regimes and new criteria of distribution and value. The establishment of a market-oriented economy was considered to be the leading societal transformation. Being interpreted as a more efficient way of organizing the production and exchange of goods, it was to substitute the previous system of central planning, with the new legal framework re-establishing the principle of private property. The processes of privatization and restitution<sup>15</sup> led to a massive transfer of assets and re-evaluation of property by the rules of the emerging market. To put it plainly, what this means is that prior to 1991 there was a clear domination of the public over the private domain and regulated collective interest was a political priority of utmost importance. Spatial changes were in the domain of planned, processed by a “top-down” methodology.

After 1991, the realm of ownership turned around. In synergy with political reforms, the urban territory became fragmented into private property possessions. Following this process, financing, planning, designing and producing urban and architectural space have undergone significant changes.

The process of political decentralization is another important societal transformation that affected the re-development of urban territory. Pre-defined as a model of more successful control and financing over collective services, the shift of power to local governments was accepted as a global model that will meet the demands of the society and will fundamentally improve the micro-economic map of the country. However, this

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>15</sup> Republic of Macedonia is the only country in Eastern Europe and Ex-Yugoslavia to introduce and implement legislation for return of property or compensation of nationalized ownership under the socialistic regime. The process was called de-nationalization and is still in force.

process proved to be troublesome as “post-socialist municipal offices lacked sufficient institutional capacity, knowledge and funds for these new approaches to complex city governance because they were merely units subordinated to the state administration during the socialist era. Also, typically the new political elite at central government level is reluctant to allow local government to develop as a powerful political entity and, therefore, is reluctant to bestow any substantial financial autonomy on it.”<sup>16</sup> This condition of broader competences in urban development combined with the weak financial and institutional capacities turned local-self governments into participants in illegitimate urban practices. Disorientated in the framework of various private interests, urban planning was now practiced in an unprecedented way. Large scale urban planning almost disappeared as a discipline, giving way to individual innovations. Born in the desire for profit, the urbanism of self-organization shapes today’s city, and as a result, the city is now undergoing dramatic changes. Disorientated in the new framework of the “private”, urbanism and architecture started producing a new kind of urban landscapes in which the city started growing everywhere - in its center, in its periphery, in its voids, and even on top of itself.



Example of a two storey building that was ‘upgraded’ with an additional four floors

It is understandable that housing neighbourhoods and housing production are the main focus of this study as it is a major form of building activity. “*The fact that we all live somewhere makes dwelling into a habit. This habit is to a greater or lesser extent personal in nature, however, and it is not a static affair because dwelling is in principle a continual redefinition of the city. In describing the practice of dwelling, it is therefore important not only to know how and with whom it takes place, but why it has significance.*”<sup>17</sup>

As housing is the essential necessity of humans’ existence and one of the fundamental elements of any state economy, the way housing is produced and houses are designed affects the living conditions of our urban environment. In socialism, housing was

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Cornelissen, H. 2005, *Dwelling as a Figure of Thought*, SUN Publishers, p.7

considered as a subject of social distribution and a factor of social stability. Performance of the housing system was considered to be a social balancer and state intervention in this area was a high priority. In the transition process, however, the state lost its power to finance large housing projects and further reduced its financial intervention in the subsidization of housing. As the macro regulation was substituted with market-oriented rules, the housing sector was subjected to significant deregulation and dwellings become a costly economic commodity. Almost the entire production of housing become dominated by private investors, which led to a significant reorganization of the housing industry. As a result, a variety of profit oriented housing practices emerged, producing diversity of urban and architectural outcomes.

The city of Skopje as a field of investigation proves that private interest is increasingly changing the built environment of the city. With its current physical condition that is an outcome of urban discontinuities, Skopje's urban growth is unparalleled compared to any other city in the country. Historic urban legacy in combination with the emergent forces of socio-economic nature led to a process of rapid rewriting of the urban form. As the study reveals, the development of new urban substance goes beyond the traditional forms and concepts of the city. The transformation takes place on every level and on every scale, from territorial to architectural, where the substance of the city is produced by an incoherent system of planning.

## **Methodology**

### *Using ICT to increase participation of citizens*

The present study contributes to the debate on the (post-socialist) transformation of cities. The greatest benefit of this project is that it represents a systematic visual study that enables the general public to see the ways in which political, economic and social transformation at the large scale, and institutional policy and decision making at the small scale, are affecting the production of urban form of the city. The empirical aim of this project is to provide the general public with precise values and data on the spatial outcomes of the urban restructuring through the case study areas of Debar Maalo and Bunjakovec neighbourhoods in Skopje.

Using both empirical and visual descriptive methodology, the study sheds light on the factors and actors that are responsible for the recent architectural production. At the same time, by providing the public with a timeline tool through which users can precisely and accurately investigate the historical and morphological patterns of the growth of selected neighborhoods, this project reveals the character and the scope of the replacement of the urban fabric. Furthermore, the user-friendly visual interface design of the web platform is specifically created for those who are unfamiliar with reading urban plans. Since the rewriting of urban space is also a rewriting of our urban future, this project helps us evaluate the new urban outcomes as they bring new interactions and notions of a new social and cultural context. For instance, the platform reveals what decision-makers do not, which is that the biggest loss in the process of urban fabric replacement are the green areas of the neighbourhood. The web platform enables its

visitors to easily conclude that that green areas are literally “replaced” and will disappear based on the 2020 detailed urban plans. Furthermore, as the street patterns remain as they were before and the mass of the buildings rises up dramatically, the streetscape is changed beyond recognition. The newly constructed neighbourhoods now host an increased number of inhabitants, as buildings cover almost all of the plots. The green spaces cease to exist as they are substituted with parking lots, congested with vehicles that are the result of the population growth.

### *Debar Maalo and Bunjakovec*

The research project covered two neighborhoods in the city Center: Debar Maalo and Bunjakovec and these were chosen based on the following key reasons:

*Location:* Both neighborhoods are located in the city center, where the drastic transformations of the urban space are visible not only to the local inhabitants, but to the citizens of Skopje in general. This generates a greater outreach opportunity, considering the high frequency of traffic and people and investors as potential changers of the urban form, and ensures that citizens from other areas will be interested in the results.



*Effect:* The urban transformations that happened here in the last 20 years followed the pace of the political and socio-economic changes. The intensity and the amount of built structures created a hybrid urban model of unsustainable growth which is in our focus, because of its repetitive occurrence in other parts of the city or in other cities as well. We cover a lot of the global problem by being in the center of the processes.

*Available data:* The amount of data was crucial in making chronological and multilayered analysis of possibilities for data advocacy, and the data for the plots in these neighborhoods was readily available.

*Personal:* We live and work in this neighborhood and share its problems on a daily basis.

Archiving and processing the data collected, we focused on creating a better and clearer visual translation of the complicated detailed urban plans in order to redefine the methods of presenting the ‘final product’ of the city – neighborhood to the citizens. The aim was to create a universal, reusable and simple user-friendly interface that can analyze the basic urban parameters of different scale and layer. If the urban plans are a

synthesis of the various projections of the possible urban context and natural environment, then its presentation and interaction with the potential users is an act of the greatest public interest.

## Conditions matter: Skopje realities

A complex systematic problem like the one covered with this study can never have a single cause to put your finger on, but is rather the result of a set of repetitive errors which led to a failed attempt to tackle a certain ongoing process in the society in general, and in this area in particular. In the early 90's, when the building boom first started, one formula was common for all cases and led to systematic acknowledgement with the public, investors, and the municipality authorities. The uncontrolled growth of the urban tissue, accompanied with procedural changes of the spatial planning process, led to a global acceptance that it is not an incidental case, but a proven formula for making profit or even a model that can be repeated if needed. The model would not only allow the citizens and investors to react, but was the engine for growth of the housing areas of Debar Maalo and Bunjakovec. In this study we place the emphasis on two main problems that the platform can help solve:

1. ***Unsustainable growth model*** is a set of financial, procedural, legal, design and building actions, which can multiply the capacity of an existing residential urban typology into dense unsustainable agglomerate, with long term detrimental effects on the spatial quality, infrastructure and environment.

The formerly homogenous housing area consisted of clusters of individual houses with small typical gardens, created on irregularly shaped parcels, dating back to when this area was on the outskirts of the once Ottoman province town. With this division of the land, it is very hard to establish a model or a typical block that is replicable. The downside of this system is that it is hard to replicate typologies and to manipulate its growth in a way that the contemporary detailed plan required. The 'organic' closed blocks are created with a maximum height that exceeds the proportions with the narrow street profiles. These new housing blocks were 'chains' of new buildings placed one next to the other, with no regulated change of height or individual solutions. The hybrid model of Debar Maalo and Bunjakovec has quickly become a model for a successful and desired type of architecture mainly by solving the basic problem with the quantity of square meters needed for both the investors and the inhabitants.

The socio-economic context in which this model occurred is supported by the urban planning strategies and the laws for spatial planning and urban development. This means that it has the approval of the system and the city as a legitimate tool for urban action or signals the plan's capitulation in the face of the new reality.

2. ***The failure of the urban planning theory and practice.*** The general and detailed urban plans should be a subject of high interest for all citizens. The process and the final product must be as transparent as possible in order to inform and interact with the public about the common future of their closest urban environment or the city they all share. The private interest and its dominance

*over the public, led to a serious failure of the urban planning theory and practice to defend the basic needs for a better urban environment.*

The speed and complexity of the changes to the existing urban tissues exceeds the conventional forms of spatial design and planning. The single lane process of *input > processing > output* cannot be reversed or have its parameters changed in a short sequence. The fringe role of the urban planners or the lack of flexible rules rather than rigid obligations is a sign that there is no strategy that will support quality instead of profit.

The closeness of the covered area to the city center makes it almost worth the money the owners pay for, with prices among the highest in the capital. There are good connections with the other parts of the city, which is also positive, due to two big boulevards cutting the area through east-west and the presence of the city park by areas borders. But what is striking is its visible high demographic and structural density, as private dwellings are the only component stacked in the compact buildings. You can almost feel the syndrome of being physically close, but with a great lack of cohesion between the housing layer, parking lots, infrastructure and most notably the broken relationship with the green, open or public spaces.

The **growth** of the existing urban form is a normal process in every city. Being an open system, the cities and its urban segments constantly grow, shrink, transform and reprogram themselves. The intense migration from the rural areas of Macedonia to Skopje is an old process dating back the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of which Skopje went from being a small city to one of the capital cities in ex-Yugoslavia. The industrialization brought rapid growth and from 9.6% of the country's total population in the 1948, it went to 25% in the 1990's. The earthquake in the 1963 destroyed 80% of the city and its quick rebuilding started a process of mass immigration toward the new capital, multiplying the previous population four times over. The housing strategy at that time followed the need for new dwellers with the 'tabula rasa' method of building from scratch in the ruined city. The socialist urban planning was a centralized one and was adequate for the need to build fast and a lot of new collective housing units. Skopje became a blank sheet for practicing the methods of the modern urban planning and architecture and as any other system of spatial design, it showed its flaws with the test of time.

What is important to our case study is that the process of mass building housing blocks from the 1965-1981 bypassed this area in terms of physical changes, but in the new wider domain of the city, its location changed from being in the outskirts to becoming part of the center of the city. Being in the center of the city, the land became more expensive and attractive for a new breed of small-scale investors. After the fall of the socialist system in the beginning of the 1990's, the land was privatized, i.e. belonged to the dwellers, so it was in people's hands to upgrade their housing capacities. From the individual wishes of the locals to upgrade their own houses with a single story and within their tight financial means, it went into a collective need for a massive change of the urban landscape. There was no large-scale financial support to anticipate that need for growth and the inhabitants became investors themselves or joined forces with the investors who were not able to participate in a large scale building operation.

The relationship between the built and unbuilt space can define how much a certain urban tissue is intense in terms of **density**. In the urban planning science and practice, the desired

limit of density is controlled by parameters like the **floor area ratio (FAR)**<sup>18</sup> or **ground area ratio (GAR)**<sup>19</sup>, along with parameters like maximum height control or insolation. Back at the beginning of the 1990's, there was an irregular pattern of micro green spaces - gardens typical for this neighborhood, of which there was a significant amount, compared to the total living area per house. If we take a look at the block illustrated below, which we extracted from the website's database, the green spaces were 20% of the total floor area of the block in 1990. The ratio varied from parcel to parcel, but if we analyze it from the scale of an urban block, the amount of green space was almost 20 times larger twenty years ago. In terms of urban planning regulative, article 25 from the Rulebook of Standards and Provisions for Spatial Planning from 1999 states that “*every residential urban parcel should consist of 20% green space*”. Analyzing the projected urban situation of 2020 that we visualized in the web platform was made from the data available on the official detailed urban plans (DUP). According to the DUP and today's situation on site, the city quarters of Debar Maalo and Bunjakovec currently have 13.90% green spaces and will have only 4.5% in 2020. If we analyze the fact that in 1990 there was 21.60% of green spaces on almost 10 times less total floor area, it is evident that there was a change of strategy along the process. The transformation of the urban landscape was supported by the planning regulative in a way in which the housing domain became dominant over the green or unbuilt spaces. The Ground Floor Ratio (GAR) in the Rulebooks was changed from 60% in the 2003 to 70% in 2009. Since the transformation started, the reduction of green areas was not replaced by new or different kinds of public or private ones, nor open spaces for mixed use, so the problem became bigger with every new building erected.



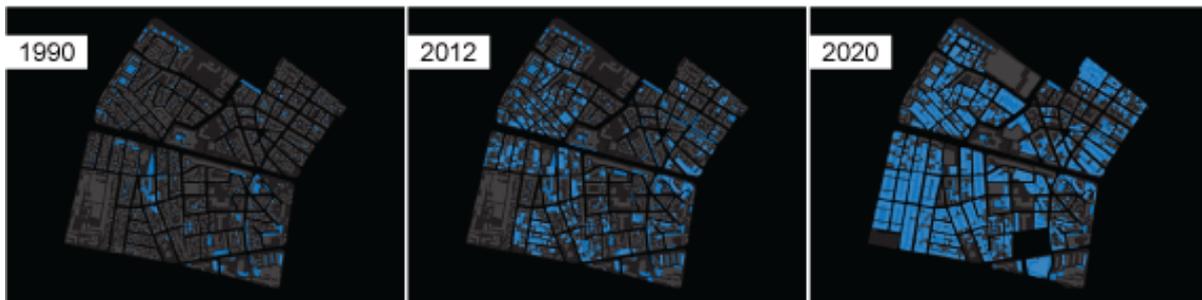
Another contradiction with the regulative system of urban planning is that a few crucial parameters are conflicting and created confusion. The Rulebooks started to change as quickly as the buildings on site and in 2009 (according to Article 5), the maximal permitted values of parameters (height, GAR, FAR) for collective housing are conditioned by the number of necessary parking lots. This means that the city makes the **car** its top priority as a regulator of the capacity and density of the built area, opposed to a different article where it promotes a more careful approach towards environmental issues. If we put more cars to get more profitable dwelling space, then we make the buildings larger and higher and the street network remains the same due to the small dense organic parcels of urban land. The streets were in the domain of the

<sup>18</sup> Ratio of a building's total floor area to the size of the parcel of land upon which it is built.

<sup>19</sup> Ratio of a ground floor area (footprint) to the size of the parcel of land upon which is built.

municipality or the city in terms of financing, so there is not much done in the past 20 years, even though the dwellers paid their share of the communal taxes.

The index for the number of cars per dwelling for the central areas in Skopje is 1.2 and that means that the already congested infrastructure should contain 20% more cars than dwelling units. The flexible and reasonable answer for this problem would be to make a regulation of this specific area to restrict the parking lots at least as the number of flats. With the number of cars increasing, the authorities gave a green light to a desperate measure of occupying the pedestrian lanes with parking lots in order to cover the shortages of private lots. Bizarre situations like this suggest that the parking areas are not sufficient below the buildings or at the floor level, so they spread out on the streets and create a pressing problem.



The parking space needed in 2020 exceeds the capacity of the traffic infrastructure

A negative effect of the ill-managed parking regulation is that below ground level it is permitted to make parking spaces on the total area of the urban plot, which means that the closeness of the concrete structures to the surface allows planting only grass but not trees. In a dense neighborhood with narrow spaces in between the buildings, and very little ground space, it is vital for the microclimate to compensate the lack of green areas with trees. Due to recent concerns about the heavy pollution of the air in Skopje, and particularly in the centre, it is of high priority to combat this problem with as much greenery as possible, not replacing it with built mass.



The decrease of the green spaces / **21.6%** (1990) > **13.8%** (2012) > **4.5%** (2020)

**Insolation** is an additional common problem for every dense urban area and mostly old town patches. Here we have a situation where buildings of significant height are erected on top of the old organic urban parcels. Within the provisions, newly projected buildings or blocks should take the insolation into consideration especially in the winter periods when the sun angle is low and the days are shorter.

After the earthquake in 1963 in Skopje, there were certain rules and strong provisions about designing and planning in an area often hit by earthquakes. The institute for seismic science was highly influential in the urban plans and the projects for collective housing before the 1990's. With the new system, the regulative became softer and the former measures or technical examinations were no longer obligatory. This deregulation was crucial to making it legal for the whole project for the Debar Maalo and Bunjakovec to go through. To be more specific, in an eventual earthquake, the narrowness of the streets and higher buildings could block the evacuation routes easily, because the approximate length of the ruins spread around the object are projected at about half of its height. This is a cause for safety concern for many citizens who still remember the massive earthquake from 1963.

Contrary to the situation now, there was a strong local connection of the former inhabitants with this area, and there was a global discontent of the public with the new drastic change of the area. The former urban typology provided the environment for the families that resided one next to another to make to most of the use of their relatively small but private open (green) spaces for social integration. As seen before with other urban districts, there was a sense of belonging in the fabric of urban entity, which was a strong factor for the relatively unchanged physical structure of the overall picture. Even with the methodology of centralized planning and the public ownership of the land use from the socialist past, the area remained intact, for most of its parts, with few inserts of collective housing blocks common for the 1960's or earlier. The lack of social interference of the inhabitants is not just a case of being romantically nostalgic or a utopian way of analyzing a complex problem. It is a clear indication of a lack of public space in the most physical way, and not just a case of misuse or a lack of multifunctionality. The uncontrolled growth left very little space for any significant public buildings or spaces that will improve the quality of life in the area. The public or social spaces need no further explanation of how they improve the quality of the residential areas, but the systematic and 'planned' neglecting is a problem, caused solely on the back of the failed vision of the urban plans to anticipate future problems like this. Most of the non-residential use goes to the commercial layer on the ground floor of every building. From a financial aspect, there is a threat that after a certain period of time, the value of the apartments could decrease, even though the general location would prevent this decrease from being drastic.

## **Changing policy: In need of a paradigm shift**

This study argues that the local authorities must realize that continuing with the current practice is damaging to the growth of this part of the city and will only generate bigger problem in the future. We propose that a paradigm shift is needed, while recognizing that quick solution is practically impossible. The goals must be initially modest, and require a commitment to change in the long term, with genuine interest to engage in debate with the public. A more transparent and broader debate about the common interests of all citizens is essential, and the incision of interest in the shaping of the vision of the city's future is crucial.

*Are the authorities ready for the new reality that will require new ways of moving the estate market within the economic domain of the decentralized city? Could we just re-use the existing urban capacities with such rigid structural and urban morphology? Those are some of the questions this study attempts to answer.*

The so far unsustainable transformations of the urban tissues offer short -ighted actions and cause long term problems on several aspects of dwelling in these neighborhoods. The building of the dwellings in the neighborhoods of DM and BU will reach its maximum capacity by 2020. This would be an end of the economic model of supplying the municipality with communal taxes and making profit of every square meter built. Since 2005, the decentralization brought more balanced variety of income for the municipality budget, but in the reality, the main part is the quantity of built space remains priority. In a time span of 7 years, there is not a significant public object built, in which the municipality was investor or supported a project which will enrich the living standard of the citizens.

On the other hand, today, many small companies and organizations (including ours) are situated here, and it can become a trend. Supporting this change (from housing into commercial area) should also be priority for the authorities and can be one of the solutions to the current problem. However, taking into consideration the rate of economic growth and the number of built dwellings, it is still a highly unlikely that a rapid change in programming can happen in the next 10 years. When the capacities for growth will be filled, than the next logical step will be reprogramming, but it will take a lot of time and with the global economic crises as a wider context it will be extremely expensive to make such transformation.

Some buildings or part of the buildings failed to keep pace with the severe transformation. Those cases are being officially named by the authorities as 'illegal' or objects with unregulated status and their number in the future will stay the same as in 2012. According to the latest detailed urban plans on the website of the municipality of Centar, their number will remain the same which suggests that no progress is being made on this subject. If the city authorities cannot solve problem like this, how can we expect improvement in more complex and hard issues?



Therefore this project '*SkopjeRaste*' (SkopjeGrows) proposes a different alternative to the non-transparent and confusing way of presenting the urban plans to the public and investigates the possibilities of educating the citizens about the problems of their block, neighborhood or the city. Visual aid and easily understandable information can play a vital role in the interaction between the users and creators of the plans. The miscommunication is a part of the complex problem and our objective is to lay focus on this particular issue. By doing this we believe that we will contribute to more inclusive policy making, but also sharing and transferring knowledge and educating citizens. We elaborate on this issues bellow in the text.

### *Inclusion, education and knowledge sharing*

**Interaction = inclusion:** The inclusion of the broader society into the urban planning process is a necessity rather than an experiment as the architects or urban planners might think. Not being participative means one not being able to influence. But as we already concluded, the real world outside will find its way of acting even by twisting or avoiding the rules or laws. If they are not flexible enough there is a greater chance for the people to react on their own, even in the city center like our case study quarters. On a contrary, by providing online inclusive platforms and inviting citizens to actively take part in defining, shaping and changing the city, local authorities not only address the needs of its citizens but also allow and nurture support for the city from their habitants. This creates a supportive environment for change.

We propose for the local authorities to adopt the application and use it as a public service within the regular work of the municipalities. The platform only shows a beginning in what we could achieve in the intention of bringing the society into the process of planning. The educational aspect is a very important one as well as the interactive because it will merge the collective knowledge of the city into an open system like we already know that exist on the internet. (google maps, open street maps, GIS systems etc)

**Education** of the citizens will also be crucial for making the general public aware about their block, neighborhood or the city. Presenting the projects to the public is obligatory, but if done in a meaningful might produce greater feedback from citizens. Additionally, educated citizens can shift their priorities and support changes that are in public interest but require for example change of habits as well (for example increasing the use of alternative transportation such as bikes). Additionally, citizens can be future source for modifications and upgrade of the system and can create an atmosphere that is enabling for greater civic participation and activism. While previously local communities (*mesni zaednici*) functioned today citizens are detached from their community leaders and there is a growing need of bringing citizens closer to the local decision-making. We believe that such mechanisms facilitate this and stimulate positive interaction.

**Digital vs physical:** Archiving the DATA is not only a technical procedure for keeping the digital knowledge of the city, but to connect with the society in the most interactive way as possible. In the information area in which we live, there is no single aspect of life which was spared by the aggressive thirst for interaction. The once political or economical powerhouses are papering the cracks over the damage left by the shift of

the power from the centralized systems to the individualism. There is no logic in opposing such reality, but to embrace it and make it at the benefit of more cohesive and humane neighborhood.

## **Beyond information, towards true participation**

Further efforts remain to be done in order for members of the public to have sufficient opportunities to articulate their needs and become involved in the democratic process of urban development. This will require more effective cooperation between all stakeholders involved, including mayors, municipal councils, citizens and professionals. This project aims to contribute to these processes. The process of inclusion of the members of the public into the system of planning should be on several fronts. Our project aims at the promotion of the subject to the citizens and their education about the basic prospects of the participation.

The website (application) was initially designed to be the first step of a complex system of information related to the urban plans or the current situation. Its aim was to create a basic tool on which we can upgrade many new layers of new information. The platform can upgrade on other parts of the city or in depth. There is a base of Meta data collected from the plans, photos and old cadastre maps. One of the problems we encountered during the work process is a serious lack of data available to work with. Many of the digital drawings came from different sources and we took some extra time to make them match. It is one of the problems that could be solved in a way that the municipality's department for urban planning can use the application as a starting point in adjusting the data collected from different sources. The upgrade should be aimed at the different layers of the urban area. For now we have operated with four of the basic ones (buildings, green areas, parking and illegal buildings) which are easy to understand for the users but also easy to upgrade for the developers. With the code of the website being open the upgrade in technical terms will be easy and the data input can be very democratic, despite the danger of misuse of the software.

We strongly believe that the nature of this project is beneficial not only for the citizens but for the municipality and the urban planners as well. It can have a wide range of use, from small scale architectural interventions to official presentations of the detailed urban projects. It can be very useful in the local meetings of the building council, where the citizens can articulate internal matters with more precision regarding the physical changes of the blocks or neighboring houses. Internal matters were a huge set back to the process of negotiation between the investors and the owners. In the past, the investors were looking for free slots or owners who wanted to upgrade, but the search process was going very private and very non systematic. In owners' or investors' benefit would be to make a more transparent or a public way of putting the each others assets in a shop window, that can be both informative and interactive. Something similar to the advertisements for apartments renting but in a more complex network of information that can explain the wider or the closest context of the desired location.

In informal talks with some members of the municipality, in the next few months they will release an application with coherent two-dimensional mapping of some information

related with the urban plans in order to solve the chaos with the digital data present between the institutions. Our project timing and purpose should complement such projects in the future, simply because there is no will on their side of making the presentations of the urban plans more transparent.