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## THE ARCHITECTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF SKOPJE FROM 1963 EARTHQUAKE TO TODAY

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### Abstract

The urban development and the architecture of Skopje can be noted with the left side of the river coast which defines the historical landmarks mostly by Ottoman Rule. The subsequent development can be divided into two timelines. The first period is the period before 1918, time when Skopje's architecture started developing, the Old City Part from the left river coast. The second period is the period between 1945-1963 which spreads in the right side of the Vardar coast. Skopje was attacked by the most destructive earthquake in its history in 1963. This situation has led to the opening of new roads in terms of architecture and urban composition of the city. Thus, the world-famous architect Kenzo Tange, together with his team, had worked on the new project of Skopje. The city's new part got a new pattern and new architectural forms with brutalist and innovative language. Unfortunately, some parts were not realized at all, some buildings were partially built, and some still exist as a mark of his work. The last project that happened in the city is Skopje 2014. This project completely changed the look of the city and its architectural composition. The aim of this paper is to re-analyze the full picture of the architectural movement of Skopje then and today, in order to reveal and clarify certain controversies related to the modern image of the architecture of the city and its protection.

**Keywords:** Skopje, Earthquake 1963, Kenzo Tange, Skopje 2014, Architecture.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Geographically, Skopje stretches on both sides of the river coasts of Vardar. Skopje has a population of about 600,000. The urban and architectural development of the city started with the left side of the river coast which defines the historical landmarks mostly by Ottoman Rule. The subsequent development can be divided into two timelines. The first period is the period before 1918, time when Skopje's urbanization started, the Old City Part from the left river coast. The second period is the period between 1945-1963 which spreads in the right side of the Vardar coast. The total number of apartments in the urban area of Skopje was approximately 36,000, of which 18.3% were built before the year of 1918, 29.5% in the period of 1918-1945,

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and 49.5% in the period 1945-1963 (Home, 2007, 1-22). The predominant residential blocks as well as public facilities, were built mostly from reinforced concrete.

Like many other cities in Balkan Peninsula, Skopje also passed through a comprehensive distinguishment from social, political and economic aspect, that changed the strategies in solving the new architecture as well as urbanization for more than two decades. Besides its role as the capital of Northern Macedonia, Skopje marks the first urban planning that was made more than a century ago. The density and population of Skopje has grown for ten times over the past century, thus, social changes affected the new way of creating the new architecture and collided with the urban pattern of the city. The consequence is, Skopje had to pass through an urban transformation by a diverse set of dynamics.

Although, Skopje has passed through several natural disasters in its history, a big number of its population has been seriously injured during the earthquake in 1963. Mostly by the population, but also from scientists and engineers with a support from the government, it caused a high level of realizations and activities for organising and sustaining the needs to implement for the earthquake disaster management. World famous architect Kenzo Tange who was the author of the "Hiroshima Peace Museum" and the "Master Plan for Tokyo Bay", won a competition which was organized in Skopje for the new city's urban concept. Kenzo Tange with his concept have changed the urban image dramatically which was planned in the other side of the river Vardar. Unlike the traditional Balkan houses from Ottoman style and the Neoclassical academic style, he designed the city through ideology of simple yet vast socialist utopia, thus, he clearly emphasizes and separates the new city districts from the old part of the city, giving a clear image of the composition of the city. The old part of the city, however, tends to be preserved and not changed because it had authentic values and historical monuments. The purpose of this was to connect the two parts of the city with two bridges as he called a "city wall". The wall contains two blocks connected to each other that define rich monumental presence. Tange's Project has been inspired by the Japanese architectural movement "Metabolism", an architectural strategy that must be easy adoptable, modern and fast.

As Petrovski (2004) states, "the last two decades of the city's development have been marked as a long and painful transition and a process in which the city has had to adjust to new complexities" (Petrovski, 2004, 1-2). Skopje 2014 is an Urban project that started in 2010 which is focused on renovation of the city. The project is supported by the government of Republic of Macedonia. The main idea of this plan is populism and creating a new European city. Everything which is defined by this project is the facades of the new buildings in the city center. The aim of this project is covering today's actual identity of the buildings and creating a new definition that interprets the forth century's Greek-Antique architecture and the revolutionaries of Bulgarian history of 1900s. The actual oriental traditional architecture of Ottoman Period in the old part of the city today is hidden with new tall monuments. Also, to some of the traces left from Kenzo Tange are given classical dressings (Figure-1,2). The purpose of this whole transformation of the city is to make a new modernist style in which, as Stefanovska & Janez (2012) are stating, it will look as if it was built two millennia ago, with characteristic candelabras from the 19th century and a Roman portico with allegorical figures that look like gold lame (Stefanovska & Janez, 2012, 91-100).



Fig. 1,2: The New Look of the Facades of old building in Skopje (URL-4)

This article will be examined with the past urban concept from Kenzo Tange that have shaped Skopje since its destruction after the 1963 earthquake and today's last concept of Skopje 2014. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that both concepts have a significant impact on urban changes in the city. In the first part of the article are described the initiatives made for urban redevelopment and remodeling the city's image after the earthquake of 1963. It then continues with the concept of famous architect Kenzo Tange who



contributed in this. His architectural style and metabolismic movement concept will be described. The last topic describes the recent project of urban and architectural transformation of the city, called “Skopje 2014” that was started at 2010. Finally, some conclusion and comments as a result from this research will be discussed.

## **2. SKOPJE 1963 EARTHQUAKE AND ITS RECOVERY PROCESS**

On July, 1963, an earthquake with capacity of 6.9 according to Richter Scale has damaged the approximately 80% of the city of Skopje (Figure-3). According to official sources and Home (2007), the earthquake killed about 2,000 people, injured about 3,300 and left 100,000 homeless, leading to a complete reconstruction of the city (Home, 2007, 1-22). The United Nation General Assembly took the lead with purpose to reconstruct and rebuild the city and illustrate internation solidarity. In total, numerous tents were brought to this damage, also several public buildings such as schools, institutions and residential buildings were built, by more than eighty countries from around the world.



Fig.3: Picture of the ruins of the Skopje Earthquake in 1963 (Petrovski, 2004, 1-2).

After the recovery process, the government of Yugoslavia has had three options. The first was to move the city’s location completely. The second option was to rebuild the city as a whole, but to keep it to a small extent and the third option was to totally rebuild the city and plan for urban growth. In the 1960s, the government has chosen the first option; Skopje’s borders to remain small in the city scale but also to become resilient to earthquakes. The other purpose was to redevelop the city as a unique, modern international capital on brutalist architecture which was a reflexion of the communism period.

### **2.1. The Master Plan for Skopje by Kenzo Tange**

In 1964, the United Nations and the Government of Yugoslavia announced an international invited competition for rebuilding the central part of Skopje. In May 31,1965, the solutions were presented to the local authorities in Skopje. The jury decided to give 60% of the first prize to Kenzo Tange Team (Figure-4) and 40% to the architects from Croatia Mishevic and Vencler (Mirkovski, 2012, 1-13).

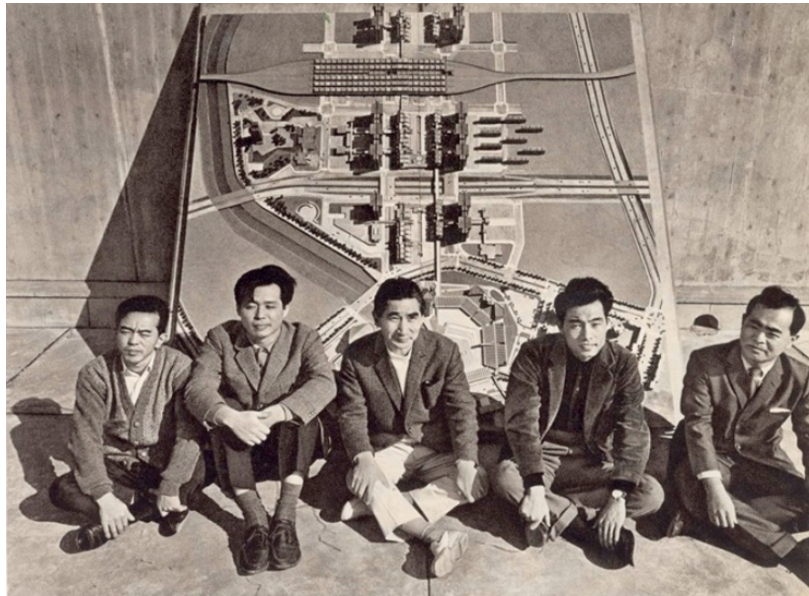


Fig. 4: Kenzo Tange and his team (URL-1).

We know the world-famous architect Kenzo Tange after his iconic project on the Hiroshima Master Plan in Japan. In his proposed concept it can be clearly seen that the plan is mostly focused on the central part of the city (Figure-5). The main two topics of this project were the so called “City Gate” (also known as the “Transportation Center”) and the “City Wall” (Lintz & Bulka, 2015, 25). The city was planned as a complex of residential blocks with aim to protect the city from eventual future disasters and in the same time Skopje to become and internationally recognizable symbol. Tange’s concept has been criticized as utopic and too idealistic (Figure- 6,7).



Fig. 5: Kenzo Tange’s reconstruction plan for Skopje (URL-3)

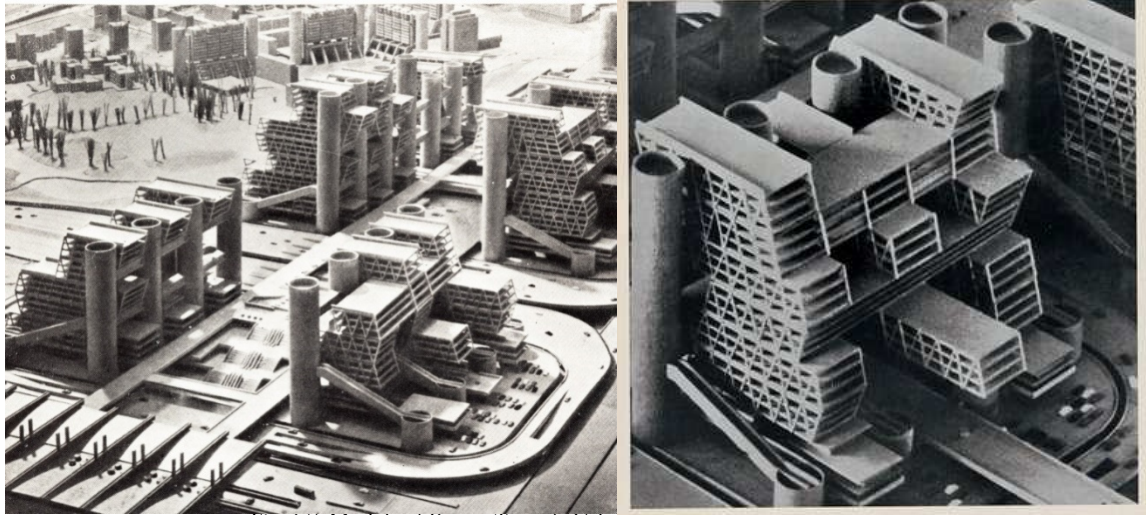


Fig. 6/7: Models of Kenzo Tange's Urban Concept for Skopje (UKL-1)

Although Tange's project was a winner, it was partly criticized as unrealistic and utopian. That led to a reconsideration and a decision for a second winner. The architect of the second winning project was from a "Croatian Town Planning Institute", which was led by the architects Radovan Mišćević and Fedor Wenzler, in Zagreb which have won the 40% of the prize has produced more modest plan for the city (Lintz & Bulka, 2015, 25). In 1966, the both Kenzo Tange's and Team and the Croatian Urban Planners produced new concept which was the combination of both utopist and modest style. Despite this, the plan was mainly based on Tange's ideas. This concept has been named as "The 1965 Master Plan". The final project for the city was a composition of existing and brutalist architecture in which many modernist and creative ideas were expressed. The goal was Skopje to get an image of an international and urban middle town, and that happened, albeit for a short time.

It was the Yugoslav central government that led the entire reconstruction process in the city. The students of Architectural Faculty had also contributed in this process. According to Home (2007), they have conducted a social survey of 4,000 families, though in reality prompted the people to accept a more international or Western image (Home, 2007, 1-22). The ideology for this was to construct low and medium-high buildings in order to eliminate about 13,000 dwellings that were single-storey and spread unplanned everywhere around the city. Strange as it may seem, the tendency in the 1990s was to create an urban and developed place. The one-storey houses had courtyards (Wilson, 2015, 5-19), but in the euphoria of the time the goal was to make high-rise residential buildings to keep the area of Skopje within small limits and to distance itself from the industrial zone. The result of this idea was forcing the population to move into the new houses and deleting the old community fabric of the city (Lintz & Bulka, 2015, 25).

As Lintz & Bulka (2015) states, "the ultimate 1965 Master Plan aimed to put straight and well laid-out residential blocks with standard utilities by moving the industrial zone to the urban fringe, create new traffic and transportation corridors and moving estates outside the urban area" (Lintz & Bulka, 2015, 25). The plan has set the boundaries of the city in a radius of around 150 acres from the new city center. On the right coast of the Vardar River (the new part) the recreational areas have been placed, including walking paths, sport stadium and parks. On the left bank of the River has been reserved for public buildings such as the national theater, part of the University Campus (Figure-8), and the television channel building (MTV-Македонска Радио Телевизија) (Figure-9). The right bank was reserved for buildings with commercial, administrative and entertaining character. With this idea, the two parts of the city would be connected together. As a result, Skopje has gained a concept where the monumental "wall" connected the old and new part of the city and in the same time a communication between two blocks from the both sides of the River "Vardar" was implied. According to Wilson (2015), one third of the total area was planned for residential buildings for about 30,000 inhabitants. (Wilson, 2015, 5-19). Outside the central zone, the industrial zone is already planned larger than the previous one, and the industrial facilities are located in it.



Fig.8: The Saints Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje (URL-5)



Fig.9: MTV (Makedonska Radio Televizija) (URL-10)

The purpose of this plan was to create a temporary international and iconic architecture of the city. The brutalist concept was also implied on the building facades with geometrical shapes (Figure-10). The ideology of this concept was to keep on the first option of the solution for post-earthquake issue as mentioned before, to keep the city borders small, to build an internationally recognizable city and to emphasize modernist architecture in the city.



Fig. 10: The Central Post Office, designed by Janko Konstantinov (URL-5)

### 3. SKOPJE 2014

After the disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation of several states in 1991, in which Macedonia was one of them, it thus became an independent Republic. This has led to a change in the leading directions such as Capitalism as a ban movement. The abolition of capitalism was reflected in a change in urban and architectural planning. According to Lintz and Bulka (2015), throughout the 1990s, North Macedonia, as well as most other post-Socialist countries, experienced a backlash against the old Socialist planning system (Lintz & Bulka, 2015, 19-31). As Petrovski (2004) states: *“The current crisis in which the city is engulfed has led to deterioration in the quality of the built environment and has created fertile ground for speculative ideas. It has become clear that urban planning is no longer able to operate as an instrument of control and development with the primary aim of protecting and promoting public interests”* (Petrovski, 2004, 1-2).

A group of architects, historians and politicians has declared a new ideology for the city’s new look. The new look of the city, towards individuals, should evoke a rich and proud history. This is where the problem with the new project in Skopje begins. This may be declared as a political strategy with purpose to redevelop Macedonia’s international image and be more accepted by the international community and especially the European Union.

In the project of Skopje 2014 has been built new public institutions mostly in the city center, such as the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle (Музеј на Македонските Борци), Stated Archives, Constitutional Court (Уставен Суд) and the National Theater (Национален Театар), designed with baroque-styled domes and large pedestals to remind of history as in many other European cities (Figure-11). In addition to the architectural and urban disruption of this new project, in Skopje 2014 they cover an area and the frequent monuments and sculptures everywhere in the city, a total of about 30. These monuments cover a large area in the public spaces and are made in various different styles.



#### **4. ARCHITECTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF SKOPJE**

As stated above, the architecture of Skopje from the project of 2014, encourages various reactions and unresolved issues regarding the overall architectural image of the city. Several examples can be considered individually in order to analyze the overall architectural image from 1963 until today. Also, as I mentioned before, some of the buildings with metabolismic architectural movement, which are mostly the work of Kenzo Tange, but also the Croatian team led by Radovan Mišćević and Fedor Wenzler that designed together the new part of the city called the Master Plan Skopje 1965, today are covered with new facades as part of the Skopje project. 2014.

When it comes to Baroque style in architecture, or if you want to call it simply classic, in any case, it is the architecture of the Middle Ages in the west. The most recognizable elements of the Baroque architecture are concave and convex lines and geometric shapes that are quite decorated with niches, pillars and volumes. In North Macedonian history, such features of architecture does not exist. On the contrary, Ottoman architecture comes to the fore here, and as proof of that, is the old part of the city with numerous historical architectural monuments. The new part of the city does not have to be inspired by the old one, but when we ask ourselves what kind of history this city is talking about, the Ottoman one is the most pronounced. However, we focus on the architectural and urban development from 1963 until today. In 2014, many transformations took place, especially the landmarks of city. Some of the building are listed bellow (Table 1):





Table 1: List of some of the buildings transformed into new ones during the period of 2014 to today

SOME OF THE BUILDINGS PARTIALLY RENEWED OR REBUILT OF SKOPJE TODAY	
OLD LOOK OF THE BUILDINGS	NEW LOOK OF THE BUILDINGS
 <p>Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia (Chausidis, 2013,67)</p>	 <p>Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia (URL-8)</p>
 <p>Assembly of the Republic of Northern Macedonia (URL-9)</p>	 <p>Assembly of the Republic of Northern Macedonia (Chausidis, 2013,7)</p>
 <p>Macedonian Telecommunications (Chausidis, 2013,12)</p>	 <p>Macedonian Telecom and T-Mobile (Chausidis, 2013,12)</p>
 <p>MEPSO - Building (URL-6)</p>	 <p>MEPSO - Building (URL-7)</p>
 <p>Macedonian National Theater (Chausidis, 2013,40)</p>	 <p>Macedonian National Theater (Chausidis, 2013,40)</p>



## 5. CONCLUSION

The differences between the Master plan of 1965 and Skopje 2014 are the ideas behind these projects mainly. In both projects the goal was the same, to highlight and modernize the city to the national audience. However, Kenzo Tange's project to rebuild the city and create a modernist identity was justified, and was not based on any political background. In this paper, I have examined the use of Kenzo Tange's and Skopje 2014's urban and architectural concepts in the formation and changing processes that they have passed through. This has been done through a theoretical and descriptive analysis supported by current and historical examples.

The purpose of this paper is not to emphasize the right or wrong in this whole process, because it is a debatable topic. However, when it comes to designing new architectural works in a city that are of a public nature and especially important for the architectural image of the city, previous movements and architectural works should be taken into consideration. Everything built today should be innovative and in line with modern conditions and technologies. Every design of a building must meet today's requirements and capabilities. The Baroque architectural style does not coincide with the history of this country and has nothing in common with it. Everything built today should be sustainable and in line with today's modern architecture. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to arrange in chronological order all the historical events of the city, as well as architectural changes, and then to reconsider what the new part of the city of Skopje should look like, with analyzing all previous events and architectural movements.

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