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The divergent legacies of the Yugoslav architectural heritage: The afterlives of "mesna zaednica" in Taftalidže, Skopje

Jana Brsakoska*, Danica Spasevska, Blagoj Daskalov, Ilcho Ilievski

Ss. Cyril and Methodius University

Civil organization in the field of architecture and cultural heritage, CITY SCOPE Skopje.

Abstract

Ongoing urban developments and contemporary social challenges increase the need for different typologies of new urban and architectural concepts, where the issue of built heritage, specifically in the case of Skopje, has become a vast problem. With the decomposition of the former Yugoslavia states in the 1990s, each of these new states inherited a significant amount of built heritage, including monuments, buildings, landscapes, and infrastructure, constructed according to the prevailing socialist urban-planning and architectural doctrines, and directed within and towards the immediate contexts of the Yugoslav community. Most of this inherited architecture vanished across the ex-Yugoslav space, while a large part of it is still left in a state of limbo.

This article aims to show the socialist built heritage's adaptation, or transformation, into new urban scenarios, using the case of Skopje to reveal more about the relationship between the heritage and the local inhabitants. It will closely examine the socialist architecture and its relation with the local memory communities, or the locals' memories. More precisely, we will focus on one unique construct that has slowly vanished in the modern-day living: the notion of *mesna zaednica*. In focusing on this notion in the urban district of Taftalidže, Skopje, we will discuss the means of transposing socialist communal features into the new, post-socialist architectural rhetoric and way of life, as well as engage with various discourses about urban heritage emerging in the urban context. Finally, we will argue in favor of several heritage and urban development theses, which can be applied to the particular case study. The article is part of an ongoing research project that presents its results in English for the first time.

* Jana Brsakoska, Faculty of Architecture, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Boulevard Partizanski odredi, no. 24,1000, Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, brsakoska.jana@arh.ukim.edu.mk
Maciej Falski, Institute of Western and Southern Slavic Studies, University of Warsaw Krakowskie, Przedmieście 26/28; mfalski@uw.edu.pl.

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Keywords

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Introduction

Architecture is often used as a tool to reflect a particular ideology. Buildings obtain meaning from their users, against the background of their architectural agendas. Architecture structures the system of space in which we live and move and has a direct relation to social life. Architecture provides the "social information" of a building as the generator of social relations, by providing the material preconditions for the patterns of movement, encounter, and avoidance (Hillier and Hanson 1984). That very "social information" is important for understanding the society, its tradition and culture, and the socio-political aspects of the system as integrated into the urban context. However, architecture's meaning can be also used in a way of "institutional practice" transcribed into a building's appearance, creating complex structures and urban contexts (Rakatansky 1991).

The establishment of Socialist Yugoslavia after WWII also meant the transcription of the ruling state's socialist ideology onto the architecture. The social information of the socialist Yugoslav architecture thus functioned as a means of integrating its citizens into the new socialist federation. However, this came to an end with its violent dissolution in the 1990s. The Yugoslav built heritage then became located in the new national contexts of the former Yugoslav federal republics, where it obtained new social meaning. In many cases, it was left to decay, or left in a state of limbo, as a reluctant and unwanted legacy of the former system (Mrduljaš and Kulič 2012). All those developments demonstrate the need for different urban and architectural concepts and typologies in the post-socialist Yugoslav republics.

In this chapter, we discuss a case study of the building known as *"mesna zaednica"*[1] to demonstrate the multilayered legacies of the socialist modernist heritage in the local context of Skopje. In particular, the research aims to show the adaptation and transformation of this specific architectural heritage in the new urban scenarios of Skopje, and to point out its social and architectural values. The research will demonstrate an interpretation of an architectural heritage, by revealing more about its architectural characteristics – the political aspects that first shaped the building, and the ones that provoked its

1 This is the name of an individual building in the urban district of Taftalidže, Skopje, which is referred to in the text as "*mesna zaednica*"; this translates to "local community."

abandonment. Moreover, it will present the social and cultural aspects of the collective memory represented through social activities.

The research is divided into three parts, developed over three separate aspects. The first part deals with the historical narratives of the socialist architecture of former Yugoslavia, and the socio-political aspects of the system as integrated into the urban context of Skopje. The second part is focused on a particular case study: one specific structure known as the "*mesna zaednica"* which will be illustrated with drawings and diagrams, in order to better present its architectural layers. The aim is to show the specific architectural elements of this particular object, as well as the locals' changing attitudes towards the building, beginning with the building of the socialist man and ending with the new, post-socialist reality. The final part deals with the social discourses over "*mesna zaednica"*, discussing the link between the local narratives, memories, and the recent activities of promoting and preserving the relevant buildings.

Finally, the research discusses the meaning of transposing the socialist communal features in the new, post-socialist architectural rhetoric and everyday life, by focusing on the legacy of the *"mesna zaednica"* in the urban district of Taftalidže, Skopje. It argues for the importance of appropriate interpretation and the greater involvement of all stakeholders.

1. Historical narratives

1.1. Architectural transcription through the historical context of Yugoslavia

Post-WWII Yugoslavia adopted socialist modernism as its dominant architectural style (Mrduljaš and Kulič 2012). Previously, during the interwar period, the Kingdom of SHS – afterward the Kingdom of Yugoslavia – had a mixed stance on which architectural influences should be adopted in establishing the system's ideology. By promoting several styles, such as academism, national-romanticism, and interwar modernism, the state institutions furthered an agenda of legitimizing the Serbo-Byzantine narrative of history (Ibragimova 2021). Ignatović (2007) points out that the constant reuse of these stylistic expressions tends to portray the Kingdom of Yugoslavia as a young progressive state with both an ancient past and vital national prospects. The beginning of the 20th century was also marked by extensive architectural production, opened to both Western and Eastern influences in the architectural context. After WW2, the influence of modernist movements was stronger and found its place in the New Socialist Yugoslavia. Following

the break with the Soviet Union and Stalin in 1948, Tito's Yugoslavia developed its model of socialism, in which architecture would follow the path of modernism (Babic 2013).

Architecture in both cases was used as an institutionalized tool, to make a transition from one state to another, more perfect state. However, this represents only a change from one state to another, and does not always mean it is a rule that the next state will be better (Zinoski 2019).

In the 1950s, the influence of the "international" style was particularly evident, resulting in autonomous architectural structures being brought to life by many local architects who had had the opportunity to work and gain experience abroad (Popovski 1981). Moreover, Yugoslavia was put at the center of many debates at the *Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne* (CIAM), which opened the path for many Yugoslav architects to be part of and contribute to official architectural debates.[2] The biggest changes begin in the 1960s with the emergence of structuralism; the architectural monumentality of brutalism was the perfect fit for Socialist Yugoslavia (Tornatora and Bajkovski 2018).

The role of institutional practices affecting the architectural form is often complex, and a unified system ideology may be reflected through architecture on different levels (Rakatansky 1991). Socialist Yugoslavia's political doctrine is transcribed in various architectural forms and programs, all over the region. In any case, these practices derive a great influence from social changes, no matter how successful they are on the level of a single building, or on a bigger scale.

1.2. Socialist modernism in Yugoslavia – the case of Skopje's modernization

Yugoslavia changed direction regarding politics after its break with the Soviet Union, which was a turning point in Yugoslav architecture and art. Yugoslavia was placed in a new geopolitical position between East and West, and in a global context, between two intensely polarized ideological blocs. Yugoslavia chose a third option through the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 in Belgrade, building its allies in Third World countries, and focusing on relations based on peace, tolerance, and partnership (Ivanovski et al 2014).

2 The *Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne* (CIAM), or International Congresses of Modern Architecture, was an organization founded in 1928 by a group of 28 European architects. The main founders were Le Corbusier, Hélène de Mandrot and Sigfried Giedion. CIAM's aim was to spread the principles of the Modern Movement, and advance the cause of architecture as a social art, focusing on all its main domains. The group was disbanded in 1959.

However, Yugoslavia remained a socialist country constituted around its working class. In the immediate post-WWII period, the state launched a modernization project that sped up industrialization. This, in turn, facilitated rural-urban labor migrations, a process that significantly altered the state's demographics (Trajanovski 2021). Simultaneously, as a socialist state, Yugoslavia invested in its welfare system. The citizens were given access to the political system and access to the benefits it provided. This was referred to as an open political system of self-management that aimed to avoid "alienation" and get closer to the "collective" (Zukin 1975). Architecture had its chance, with the increasing need for structures that would grow with the speed of industrial development (Mrduljaš and Kulič 2012).

However, the most drastic shift in the realm of architecture happened in the wake of the catastrophic 1963 Skopje earthquake. The earthquake resulted in over 1,070 civilian deaths and more than 3,300 injuries, while also making 150,000 people homeless. More than 80% of the city's built environment was destroyed. Emergency committees took immediate action, and the Yugoslav Army moved in, while humanitarian aid arrived from all the continents (United Nations, 1970).

When the ground settled, debates emerged over whether Skopje should be rebuilt in the same location. In several weeks, a group of foreign and domestic experts sent by the UN determined that Skopje could be rebuilt as the new capital of the federal state in the same spot. The Yugoslav political context at this time, during the Cold War, was also focused on easing strained international relations (Kulić 2017), and the rebuilding of Skopje was seen as a great chance to realize this project. This process focused on cooperation between countries toward the city's rebuilding, which later would make Skopje a symbol of international solidarity.

The first phase of restoring the destroyed city's morphology was the restoration of existing built structures. It had been established that 85% of the residential buildings needed demolition. The second phase of the restoration was to establish a new master plan for the city, taking into account the old town's situation as well. A detailed plan of the city center was developed, where the regulation of the Vardar River posed the main challenge (United Nations, 1970).

Ernst Weissmann, an architect of Yugoslav origin, a former student of Le Corbusier and member of CIAM, was appointed as the Head of Housing, Town and Country Planning, while the Master Plan Manager was Adolf Ciborowski, who had been the chief architect of Warsaw and planner of its post-war reconstruction (United Nations 1970; Tolic 2017). Many local

and international architects were involved in the process. During this period, serious studies were undertaken, resulting in the master plan. This plan established a new methodology, with a great emphasis on housing but also a focus on the development of public program, such as cultural, trade, institutional, and administration buildings (Ivanovski et al 2014).

At the beginning of 1965, a competition for the Reconstruction of Skopje's city center was published. This was a competition that was open only to a limited number of entrants, half of them selected from Yugoslavia and half selected from the international field. The selection process was coordinated by an international jury, under the chairmanship of Ernest Weissmann. The proposals need to follow the parameters given in the competition call. They were mostly focused on developing the public space with integrated pedestrian paths for the free circulation of people. The final parameters emphasized local development, embracing the natural features and topography of the city, and increasing green areas, with consideration toward further development and expansion (United Nations, 1970).

The winning prize was split between (60%/40%) the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange and the collaborative team from Yugoslavia, which included the Croat architects Radovan Miscevic and Fedor Vencler. The final project for the city center diverged from Kenzo Tange's winning proposal, owing to a switch in authority. At this point, the responsibility of devising a new plan went to the Skopje City Council's Institute of Town Planning and Architecture (ITPA). The decision by the ITPA was for a more detailed approach, and therefore the plan was better adapted to the morphology and existing structure of the city (United Nations, 1970).

Nevertheless, Kenzo Tange's plan offered a new methodological approach, revising the functionalist approach developed in urban planning by CIAM. It would offer the futuristic methods of implementing the Japanese concept of "metabolism", proposing an open city structure with an ever-growing tendency. This would be an ambitious plan, future-oriented, and it would be overwhelmingly geared towards the city's needs, as well as the technical and financial capacities of the country (Ivanovski et al 2014).

Kenzo's proposal defined the city in autonomous zones, the City Gate and the City Wall, that would work as a social system of their own, enabling communication between the architecture and its users[3]. The plan consisted of the following: The City Gate would be placed at the far east of the city, where the new transport center would be, following the two main squares, the

3 See more: Niklas Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory* (2012).

Republic Square and Square Sloboda, defined by the institutional, cultural and trade zones, continuing to the west with the City Wall – a perimetral block of residential buildings wrapping around the city center (United Nations, 1970). In this way a connection between the separate systems is provided, and an accent is put on the east-west axis that opposes the already existing north-south axis defined by the old city core. The newly formed urban-architectural concept represents the beginning of new architectural interpretations that would later become the silhouette of the "city of solidarity" (Mijalkovic and Urbanek 2011). The infrastructure was another significant part of this stage. Two main roads were developed in circles, known as the Small and Big Rings, where the formation of the transportation system mimics that of the building groups (United Nations, 1970).

The concept of communal places was also integrated into the residential areas, with defined semi-public centers for socialization inside the residential blocks. New terminology was created to describe and reference the new zones. The previously-mentioned Old Axis, which contained the old town structure, would connect to the new part of the city through the Old Stone Bridge in a north-south direction. The New Axis, which comprised the newly developed centers alongside the River Vardar, began at the west relative to the entrance of the city, and ended in the east with the residential block (Tange 1971) (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Skopje's City Center Plan 1965 – Kenzo Tange. Illustration: Jana Brsakoska

Despite the great challenges that occurred with this almost-utopian approach, the plan would dictate the path of urban development, ironing out the national identity of Skopje at the time as a modern city. Some of the best examples of "brutalist" architecture and Modernism found their way to rise to new heights in the Skopje architectural scene. An archipelago of architectural artifacts would follow, designed by many national architects. Macedonian architects have had a great contribution to the international architectural collection (Ivanovski et al 2014) (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2: Student dormitory "Goce Delchev," Skopje – 1969-1977. Architect: Georgi Konstantinovski; Photo: Ilcho Ilievski, 2019.



Figure 3: Main Post Office and Communication Center, Skopje – 1972-1981. Architect: Janko Konstantinov; Photo: Ilcho Ilievski, 2019.

Another aspect of the Yugoslav political project was focusing on residential architecture in Skopje, due to the need for quick and efficient accommodation for citizens that had lost their homes in the earthquake. For that purpose, entire neighborhoods were built consisting mainly of houses or collective buildings made from pre-fabricated materials. The standards for equality that the Yugoslav socialist ideology strived for were now adopted in reality. Thirteen different suburban zones were built through the process of defining urban plans for housing for every part of the city. This was the fastest way to populate the post-earthquake Skopje (Gelevski 2014)[4]. Alongside those, schools, kindergartens, commercial centers, and health institutions were built as well. The new housing blocks were built thanks to previously successfully established international collaboration with the donations of many countries, which represented their solidarity with the citizens of the city of Skopje (Galić 1975).

The modernization of Skopje was developed in phases, implementing the main features of Tange's plan for the city center as well as the planning tendencies for the development outside the central area. However, the plan was never fully completed in its total capacity, leaving the city layering in fragments that later would become empty – "gray spaces" (Janev 2017). Several discourses interrupted its finalization over time. A critical point was in the 1980s, when, due to political tensions in the state, the dominant paradigm was lost and replaced by an ethnocentric one. The 1980s provides an example of the way state institutions were involved; the authors of post-earthquake Skopje were criticized for the "modernist and functionalist" planning, and a bigger emphasis was put on the reconsideration of the traditional city's legacies. These discourses contributed toward a greater departure from the "brotherhood and unity" ideology (Trajanovski 2021).

Furthermore, with Yugoslavia's breakup in the 1990s, the former federal units started to gain independence. The loss of institutions, followed by great system changes, means the loss of the value system and its misuse by various actors both formal and informal. After the wars of the 1990s, most of the Yugoslav architectural legacy vanished and a big part is left in a state of limbo, forgotten and not properly known by newer generations. Until 1991, this heritage never received proper treatment from scholars, and long after the breakup, it continues to be ignored by the authorities (Trajanovski 2021).

The complex reality of Yugoslav architectural heritage is too difficult to be reduced to a simple statement. It is very problematic to navigate the newly

4 See also Milan Mijalkovic, Katerina Urbanek, "*PRE/FABRIC: The Growing Houses of Skopje*" (Wieser 2018).

established context of the ex-Yugoslav countries, yet the difficulties of their past and present are too important to be neglected (Babic 2013). Many countries in Europe have implemented programs of artistic regeneration to meet the expectations of the contemporary world without deforming the inherited identity, but many of the former Yugoslav countries haven't, and that is also the case with Skopje.

1.3. Political practices in Socialist Yugoslavia – the essence of the local community

Amid the collective labor of rebuilding a city that had suffered a catastrophic hazard, the political system of Yugoslavia developed a strategy to involve citizens in the process of building the city. Self-management in Yugoslavia is a feature of socialist doctrine, where the citizen is given access to the political system and its benefits in a balance between authority and community (Zukin 1975).

With the constitution of Yugoslavia in 1963, a decision was made for creating local communities of interest to the citizens. One of the basic forms of self-management is the voter's meeting, held every other month in the local community (*mesna zaednica*) (Deets 2022). The local community was a unit in a precise territory, where the working class and citizens played a significant part as a result of their living together in a particular place. Working-class people and citizens founded local communities as part of one settlement or several related settlements. They made their influence and decisions through different forms of self-rule; thus, the local community was exclusively social rather than political. Working-class people and all other citizens participated in the decisions of the local community, in the process of urban planning, infrastructure, child and social protection, education, culture, physical culture, consumer protection, protection and promotion of the human environment, national defense and social self-protection, and any other issues related to life.

According to Sharon Zukin (1975, 33): "[t]he local community (*mesna zaednica*) is the first level of territorial community in whose framework citizens can directly decide or primarily influence decisions which regulate communal questions". This was a concept, also adopted in Skopje, which successfully functioned in Yugoslavia, and for some time after the breakup of the Federation. Together with its habitants, it greatly contributed to the process of rebuilding and the future development of the capital city of Macedonia.

The local communities were accommodated in already existing buildings, but in the spirit of modernization, many new ones were also built. Later on in

ex-Yugoslav countries, practices of the local community were affected by the transition from one political system to another, with the main political aim of decentralization. City governments shifted their focus from management to post-industrial economic development. The new Law on Local Self-Government, adopted in the Republic of Macedonia in 1995 and revised in 2002, abolished the mandatory existence of local communities. This Law regulated the competencies of the municipalities, which gained more power and independence as well as financial autonomy to manage their funds and coordinate local culture, education, health, and public service programs, as well as gain greater control over urban planning. Local communities weren't needed anymore, along with their physical premises, so immediately the various facilities and their land became private property owned by private investors.

These shifts have been a concern for democratic theorists. With local governance, in theory, the citizens can directly connect to local officials and discuss their issues. In practice, however, these arrangements involve a variety of actors, requiring strong social capital and civic activism, and individual citizens face barriers to effective participation (Deets 2022).

These subsequent actions shook the fragile state of the city and created a solid foundation for further uncontrolled urban development in individual municipalities and settlements, visibly changing the urban morphology and architectural features to meet private rather than collective interests.

2. Case study

2.1. Architectural characteristics of the *"mesna zaednica"*

The following is a case study of the *"mesna zaednica"* building in Taftalidze, Skopje (Figures 4 and 5) in order to demonstrate the significance of the Socialist architectural heritage.

The architectural object does not only represent the final result, but it also leaves marks in the process. A critical view of architecture can be established by reading those marks (Eisenman et al 2003). The building becomes essential, articulated, and transparent through multi-layered decomposition of the architectural structure and observing it in several respects (Rowe and Slutzky 1997). Therefore, this case study is based on a method that decomposes an architectural object into several levels to point out its complex programmatic, spatial, and structural features.

The building in question was designed by the Macedonian architect Kiril Muratovski in 1971 (Konstantinovski 2001). It is located in the neighborhood

of Taftalidze in Skopje, and it was built as a local community for the local citizens. Later on, it would serve the needs of a broader community.

The analytical approach uses a procedure that enables building decomposition, allowing for the observation of several architectural aspects (Figure 6): A1, formal aspects: spatial structure; A2, program aspects: program and circulation; and A3, structural aspects: material, design, and color.



Figure 4: The local community building known as "mesna zaednica", Taftalidze-Skopje – 1971. Photo: Jana Brsakoska, 2019.



Figure 5: The local community building known as "mesna zaednica", Taftalidze-Skopje – 1971. Photo: Jana Brsakoska, 2019.

Decomposing the constituent volumes of the building reveals regular geometric volumes, dominated by the rectangle. The geometric volumes intertwine with each other and form clearly defined centers, positioned asymmetrically around a central axis, where the rhythm of the composition is achieved. The harmonious definition of the composition as a whole is achieved through local symmetries of individual volumes and the harmonized scale levels.

The program in the building is divided into two complementary program blocks (A and B). One is a larger space for public meetings – the public hall. The other one is divided into smaller spaces, mostly for administrative work. The building is predominantly developed on the ground level but also contains underground technical rooms (B'). The floor plan is distributed mainly horizontally. Vertical communication enables direct relation with the basement. The building allows for uninterrupted circulation of visitors through the main entrance on the ground floor.

The public hall rises above the standard height on the ground floor and resembles a three-aisled basilica in the floor plan. This solution contributes to better lighting, and also gives the space a spiritual monumentality that, in communication with its users, reflects a powerful meaning.

Each of these blocks accommodates a program that is appropriate for a specific activity following the necessary capacities and parameters for its successful function. The functionalist approach is expressed in the program distribution, and the needed functions are accommodated rationally.

Each indoor space is naturally lit through appropriately dimensioned facade openings and additional roof lighting in the public hall. This way, the building absorbs a large amount of light, which contributes additionally to the ambiance and creates spatial harmony in the building.

The building is an embodiment of "brutalism,"[5] as it is composed of multiplied modular concrete elements, with a detailed facade surface that reveals the material's roughness. The constructive elements form functional spaces and programs that dramatically increase the effect of monumentality.

The appearance of the building is enhanced to the level of expressionism, achieved through the facade's sculptural decoration, which has no load-bearing capacity. Each element, separately and in a group, evokes emotion,

5 Brutalism, among the numerous styles from the period of Modernist architecture, takes a special place in the Yugoslav city morphology. Even if the term sounds brutal, the architectural style offers a sculptural expression of form and uses simple materials. Brutalism as a style is part of the Modernist architecture movement that developed at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, but reached its culmination in the 1950s into the late 1960s.

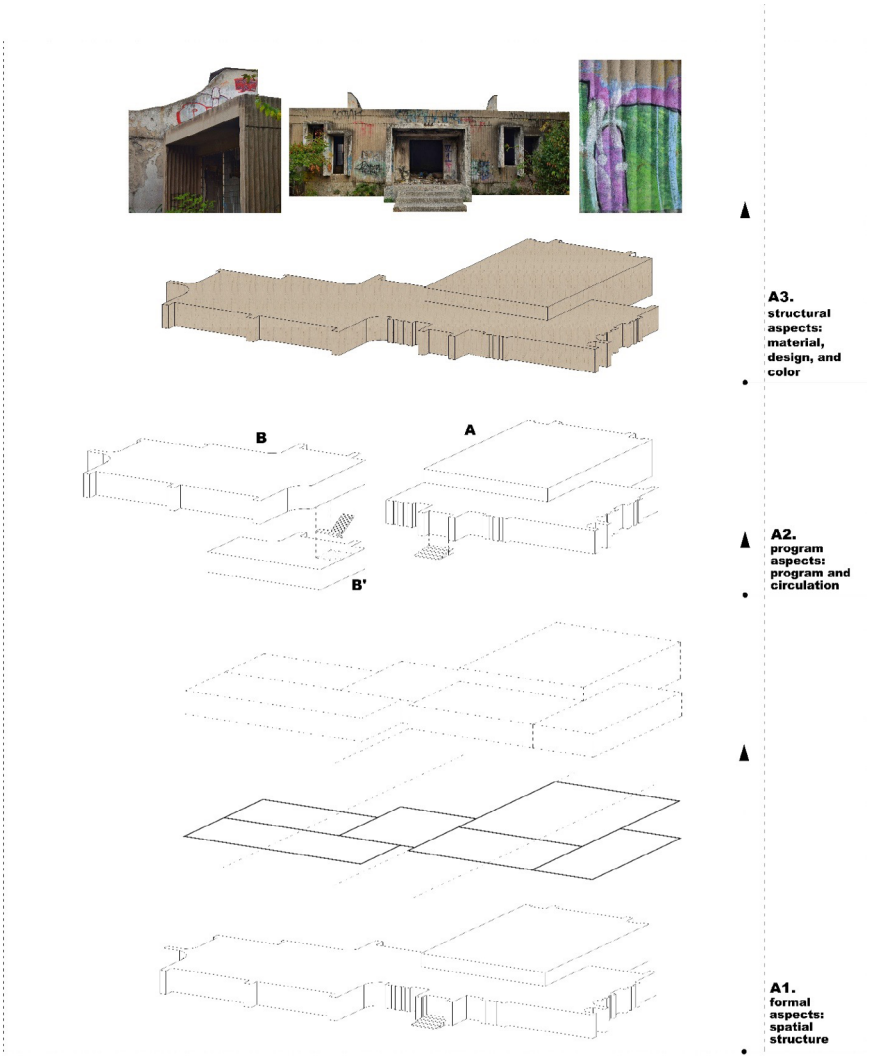


Figure 6: Diagram – Decomposition of local community building "mesna zaednica," Taftalidze, Skopje – 1971. Illustration: Jana Brsakoska.

provoking various ideas and thoughts in trying to interpret it. The object is built of concrete, where the material, in combination with the structure, creates "brutal" forms.

The building's architectural composition integrates contemporary architectural styles and trends that influence the basic concepts of form articulation. With expressive use of concrete, architect Muratovski achieves clear programmatic and formal units. On the other hand, by examining the multiple layers of the structural aspects, we are talking about homogeneous structures with a narrative that does not directly reference tradition, but allows for a free way of interpretation.

Through an abstract representation of the individual layers, the building achieves a system of references that are not only limited to form, program, and structure. An important notice is that the building gained meaning that is a reminiscence of an architectural theme (Schultz 2007).

Today, these aspects lose their meaning as the building slowly decays, and it is much more difficult to understand them. As a place where working-class people and all other citizens participated in making decisions about the local community, the memories of it are preserved for as long as people remember.

2.2. The afterlives of the "*mesna zaednica*"

After the breakup of Yugoslavia, the shift in the political system contributed to a painful transition, one of the main focuses of which was the privatization of the land and inherited buildings. The privatization process put much of the city's architecture in the hands of various private proprietors, which made positioning it within future city development more difficult.

Nowadays, the building of the "local community" is privately owned by the Socialist Party of Macedonia (SPM). The circumstances of this building coming into the ownership of the Party in the 90s, and whether the Party had the right to own it, was decided in court. The final decision was in favor of the Party as a suitable successor, having previously owned property rights as one of the organizational structures in the Assembly of the Municipality of Karpos. With the privatization of space and new laws for local self-government, the functioning of the building stopped. The Party's intentions in the following 30 years were to remove the existing building and build new housing facilities on the property. Changes in the urban plan by the local government in 2012 opened up opportunities for the realization of these Party tendencies. These activities caused dissatisfaction among the local population. Later on, in 2018, the newly established local government decided to temporarily stop the construction process and the building's demolition was a positive outcome of

the local's demands (Dimkovska and Arsik 2021). However, uncertainty over the building remains, and all these subsequent decisions further compromise its physical condition.

Today the building is out of use due to the lack of quality analysis of public spaces and proper urban planning. The building is abandoned and in awful physical condition. Its formal aspects and its architectural expressions are preserved, but broken windows, garbage, and space buried in darkness and silence are the new characteristics of the building. Nowadays it is a place that becomes invisible and very soon forgotten.

The building may still exist, but aggressive intentions toward its erasure put it in a state of limbo. Many unsolved political issues are continuously contributing toward its worsening physical situation. On the other hand, the building still lives and functions in the collective memory as a symbol of a place of solidarity, a place for decision-making processes, and a symbol of an architectural style with spatial qualities, all followed by cultural and spiritual uplift. Therefore, the citizens constantly reopen the question of its existence.

3. Social discourses

As mentioned before, the building gains its meaning when communicates with its users. By creating relations, this meaning reflects social information, and therefore reflects the socio-political and cultural aspects of the society. For the city, it is not only the building as a material and architectural artifact that creates its essence, but also the collective memory, as a series of values produced from the collective imagination. It is a synthesis of dialogues between the tangible and the intangible that refers not only to the real structure but also to the idea of it (Rossi, 1981).

Originally intended to become a place for the community, the *"mesna zaednica"* building also becomes a multifunctional space for several social and cultural activities, and by these means its essence becomes deeply engraved in the memory of the community.

As an answer to the slow decay of the building, many activities have occurred in many shapes and ways in the past years, all in favor of evoking the memory of the building. The building has been truly inspirational.

A self-organized informal group "Urban Work Action" or URA!!!, works to create new cultural models for the care and protection of public spaces that are decaying. In 2012, this group organized several events and work actions in the yard of the facility, with creative workshops for children, cooking

food, eco-lectures, meditation, tango, parkour, etc. These found response and support among the local population (Dimkovska and Arsik 2021).

Furthermore, in 2018 a group exhibition was held under the title "Endangered Species" that represented a selection of significant buildings from the recent architectural history of Skopje that contribute to its architectural heritage, and are threatened by political and ideological changes and lack of public recognition. The exhibition was a continuation of the scientific paper of the same name by Jovan Ivanovski, Ana Ivanovska Deskova, and Vladimir Deskov. At this exhibition, a model of the *"mesna zaednica"* building was presented as one of the significant buildings in shaping the modern architectural identity of the city (Marh 2018).

The organization City Scope Skopje in 2020 put a focus on the importance of the architectural aspects of the building followed by the strong political ideologies in Socialist Yugoslavia (City Scope Skopje 2020), already elaborated upon in this research. This is an ongoing research project that has provoked and successfully established a network of follow-up activities.

As a sequel to this initiative in 2021, a publication "Echoes on the Walls" was promoted by the organization Cultural Echoes, elaborating upon the political aspects that are responsible for the building's situation today (Dimkovska and Arsik 2021).

Aside from the strong activism toward preserving the building and its architectural characteristic, many artists were also inspired by it and dedicated their work to raising awareness.

Some of the memory-related aspects of the building were researched through the interdisciplinary workshop "Lost Modernist Utopias" in 2021, organized by the Faculty of Things That Can't Be Learned (FR~U). The workshop resulted in a performance in the building's yard, where the storytelling symbolically narrated 12 sets of occurrences as an act of remembering the most notable events that happened in the building. The presented memories were a collage of social, political, and cultural events, mostly in the time of the building's prime, when it worked at its full capacity, but also unfortunate events that contributed to its abandonment.

This project continued in 2022 at the Akto Festival for Contemporary Arts, within the frame of a long-term artistic interdisciplinary project entitled "The City As a Stage." The project's aim was to transform the public space into a stage on which the problems of the community were "performed." In this manner, the public space could become a place for intervention and promotion. In the process of writing and reading about a building, a series

of research processes were developed such as work meetings and workshops, where people of different professions and backgrounds gathered. These processes also included archiving, video and audio interviews with local citizens, conversations, researching archival private videos, and taking photos. This program emphasized care as a way of self-determination, as a political act, and as a collective concern of the community, in the direction of better collective living and greater inclusiveness. The project had a performative installation in a public space that premiered during the 47th International Theater Festival (MOT) (Akto FRU 2022). Furthermore, as a continuation, this interdisciplinary project participated in the "Imaginary Borders" exhibition, which was held from June 23 to August 28 on the "Subin" plateau in Limanski Park in Novi Sad (Novi Sad 2022).

In 2022 another event was realized focusing on the "mesna zaednica" building. The workshop, "Skopje Brutalism Traces," was held within the program Writing Urban Places as part of The European Cooperation in Science and Technology, called COST Actions. The workshop aimed to understand and valorize the local architectural legacy and to re-establish lost social and cultural values, with particular focus on the "mesna zaednica" building. The workshop resulted in a public performance taking place in the yard of the Faculty of Architecture in Skopje. A scaffolding installation represented a part of the building's inner space, where the workshop participants performed in three acts that showed three general approaches to telling stories about the building (Writing Urban Places 2022).

Another project that deals with the importance of the building and its existence is the young artist Elena Chemerska's art installation "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," which won the first "DENES" prize in 2021. Explaining the reasons and the meaning of her art intervention, which was directly inspired by the "mesna zaednica" building, the artist said in 2022:

> The work is composed of several different modular pieces, which together should open a space that is in some way reserved for knowledge of the processes that imply thinking. So not "I know", but, "I think". I am vulnerable, I do not know things, and I think things. The installation firstly is placed in the yard of the building, where the idea is not to take sides, to say this is how it should be or this is not, but to see what can be done with the elements that we have at our disposal. These are fragments left from some times of some legacies that are here now, not

> only to preserve them but also to use their potential, or to merge them, to be able to make some combination with them to see if it will open a new perspective for us, not only as spectators but also as agents. So it seemed to me like a happy combination, the installation and the building, where the installation can gain even more meaning when it settles in this building, which has its history, its context, and everything that carries weight. On the other hand, maybe even that building, if animated with something like this, can somehow benefit from that attempt for artistic intervention in its physical space.

These activities in the last 10 years have targeted different audiences and increased the building's visibility. They have actualized the question of the building's architectural values, focusing on collective memory. Formal and informal organizations assumed the role of the narrators of the activities and memories of the building when it was in full use, as well as the political and historical forces that drove the building's changes. In the last three years, the activities have significantly increased with greater media coverage, enabling the building's promotion in many aspects and thus attracting a more diverse audience.

Table 1 shows a detailed overview of activities, target audience, media coverage, and outcomes of these processes:

Table 1: Table – Social discourses.

	Audience	*Media coverage*	*Outcomes*
ACT.12: "URA!"	local citizens; citizens	social media (Facebook event)	reactualization
ACT.18: "Endangered species"	local citizens; citizens; professional public; students	social media (Facebook event); news portals; web sites	reactualization; raising questions about architectural aspects and survival of endangered buildings
ACT.20: "City Scope"	local citizens; citizens; professional public	social media; web sites	promotion; initiation; research of architectural values

Table 1 continued: Table – Social discourses.

	Audience	*Media coverage*	*Outcomes*
ACT.21-1: "Echoes on the walls"	local citizens; citizens; professional public;	social media; news portals; web sites; television	promotion; research of political and cultural aspects;
ACT.21-2: "Lost modernist utopias"	local citizens; citizens; professional public; students; artist; cultural workers	social media; news portals; web sites; television	storytelling; initiation of activities for the building
ACT.22-1: "The city as a stage"	local citizens; citizens; professional public; students; artist; cultural workers	social media; news portals; web sites; television	storytelling; activism; initiation; public place as a place for intervention and promotion
ACT.22-2: "Imaginary borders"	local citizens; citizens; professional public; artist; cultural workers; international public	social media; news portals; web sites; newspapers; international television	International promotion; storytelling; addressing issues; critical approach
ACT.22-3: "Skopje brutalism traces"	local citizens; citizens; professional public; students; artist; cultural workers; international public	social media; news portals; web sites;	international promotion; storytelling and writings; reestablishing social and cultural values
ACT.22-4: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins"	local citizens; citizens; professional public; artist; cultural workers; international public	social media; news portals; web sites; television	international promotion; thinking about vulnerable places

Unfortunately, in the last 30 years, there were many attempts to forget this building in a manner of repressive erasure, which has been a characteristic approach of totalitarian regimes in history. Through the use of various tools to achieve that goal, the object goes through various processes of becoming anonymized the space in the eyes of the individual.

To forget, as a biological condition, is not always negative, and does not necessarily mean weakness. Sociologist Paul Connerton defines forgetfulness as the inability of the individual to remember distant history, and arranges the meanings of forgetfulness into several categories: "repressive erasure; prescriptive forgetting; forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity; structural amnesia; forgetting as annulment; forgetting as planned obsolescence; forgetting as humiliated silence" (quoted in Bakalčev and Tasik 2015).

Structural amnesia, on the other hand, according to Connerton, tends to remember only those connections, personalities, events, and images that are socially and culturally important, and in terms of architecture, the important formative features of a building. This type of amnesia makes new interpretations possible where the original function is forgotten. On the other hand, the socio-cultural aspects of memory, and at the same time the powerful expression of the architectural form, offer the possibility of renewal (Bakalčev and Tasik 2015).

The story of the "*mesna zaednica*" building can be recognized in this meaning of forgetfulness, which offers opportunities in terms of reinterpretation. It is not desirable to "freeze" this space in time and pretend that it is still "alive," or completely change it. What is more important is that historic urban landscapes are seen as evolving. Adaptation should be encouraged within a set of performance guidelines that recognize various components of heritage as assets and resources for the sustainable future of local inhabitants.

The management of a historic urban landscape requires the collaboration of all stakeholders, including politicians, planners, environmentalists, property owners, investors, and the community. It would be considered a success if the facility can establish these relationships in the path to institutional recognition for its multilayered significance. This would help in the long upcoming process of reviving the forgotten architectural heritage in Skopje, and give it the place it deserves in the city's memory.

Concluding remarks

It should be clear from the outset that we are dealing with living cultural resources that are slowly vanishing. This research, concentrated on a specific

building, covers several aspects that form correlations in defining the building's ultimate functionality. In that manner, an analytical approach is developed, yielding data that will contribute to appropriate intervention in the future.

The features of a building shape the architectural appearance in the urban space. Architectural appearance involves directed observation, closely related to human perception. This observation depends on the observer's state of mind and feelings towards the observed object. Architecture aims to articulate the space in which we live, where its interpolation in context should be integrated and directed toward all the senses simultaneously. Through the sensory affirmation of context, architecture builds the experience of our existence.

Therefore, all other aspects – sociological, political, and cultural – contribute to the completion of the appearance of the building and toward shaping collective memory. This is one of the most powerful instruments in the creation of architectural value. The elaboration of these aspects should be considered primal in preserving and promoting an architectural heritage.

In the case of the "*mesna zaednica*", each of these aspects plays a significant role in shaping the positive meaning of the building. All the activities of the social discourse so far indicate a forgetting of the primary function of the building, but not of its socio-political and cultural significance, much less its representative form. This indicates that structural amnesia is a powerful tool in the process of its reinterpretation.

By noticing the different approaches and activities of the past few years, which have been of great importance for building promotion and protection, it becomes clear that for some action to be taken, first a solid interpretation of the architectural heritage is needed, but to go further in the process of preservation, a collaboration between all stakeholders is demanded.

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