

## FOREWORD

Dear readers,

In the discourse on urban life, there is always a risk of a constant emphasis on loss – the open and colorful city life in public spaces being privatized, commodified or segregated in new ways. Putting aside the urban imaginary and perceptions of the modern city (Donald 1999), the mere fact of urban densification inevitably leads to shrinking public spaces. While public spaces are always under threat, a diachronic perspective enables us to see how some areas and meeting places are enclosed or disappear while others are born. In a constantly changing cityscape, there are restrictions imposed but also new emerging potentials for claiming collective space. This transformation is additionally burdened by the demographic changes particularly noticeable in last decades. Cities have always been the hallmark of diversity and we must take into account this social fact.

As a basic fact of social life, one may safely say that there is no city without plurality. In terms of languages, religions, nationalities and citizenship, Europe is certainly more diverse today than 50 years ago. In that sense, we may indeed speak of progressing pluralization, or rise of superdiversity (Vertovec 2007). However, from a historical point of view, religious, linguistic, or any kind of diversity in Europe has rather been the norm than the exception. Diversification, nevertheless, is not a neutral or absolutely benign process, but is rather an ambiguous one. Any new type of diversity and every new wave of experienced difference will inevitably provoke debate, raise contradictions and endless confrontations bringing us to the predicament of difference (Ang and St Louis 2005). What poses a challenge to defining public interest is not the fact that there is diversity but rather the kind of diversity there is. Resolving those differences for the vaguely defined public interest in the contemporary cities is a daunting task, but it must not be ignored.

The various uses of public spaces and motions of users, differentiated by national, religious and otherwise defined backgrounds, in public spaces, as well as diverse and divergent aesthetic preferences, depending on social milieu, are putting pressure on urban planners, for whom these interests all too often appear to be mutually exclusive. Even priorities are a matter of controversy: should the focus primarily lie on designing public space for as many different interest groups as possible in one single space, or is aesthetics the key factor (and whose aesthetics)? Is it more important to promote local businesses or to counterbalance

social inequality? Finally, it appears that particular social groups that are more powerful, are always in a better position to define the “public interest”.

The theme of living together certainly has its continuity throughout the history and development of civilization, in which all transformations, every progress, and all social divisions are mirrored in the cities. This kind of diversity in ethnicity, culture and religion tend to create separate and different open/public spaces and more generally speaking, urban landscapes. The forms and shapes of the urban built environment, expressed through architecture and cityscapes reflects these efforts to organize social life, sometimes in accommodating manner accounting for the differences, sometimes by assimilatory design of dominant imposition. We have encouraged our invited authors to take an innovative research approach, bringing forward interdisciplinary research, ideally through the users’ experiences. This collection managed to combine various perspectives and provides for cross-disciplinary dialogue on a common platform broad enough to transcend the architectural and urban planning approaches, to better inform them and enrich them. Following Czepczynski, we argue that there are two, opposing approaches to understand landscapes: one, held by ecologists and urbanists understand landscape as an entity, other, held by anthropologists and historians, see landscape as relationship (2008: 2). With the papers in this special issue, we try to combine these different views into a productive discussion that hopefully enriches our understanding of the built environment and helps us recognize and articulate the needs that inhabitants have.

Architectural innovations to change communities’ lives come not merely from good intentions, but must be based on robust research and analysis from other fields of knowledge concerned with urbanity and the built environment. Built on concepts of anthropology, sociology, human geography, cognitive psychology, and other social science disciplines and humanities, successful human-centered architectural design projects are the results of a holistic understanding of their intended users. The success of human-centered architectural designs isn’t measured by their size or glamour, or pure aesthetical criteria, but by how much value they add to their users’ daily lives. Same wise, the research in various social science disciplines that deal with human habitats and social interaction could and should benefit from advances in architectural thought. Moreover, it becomes increasingly evident that such endeavors, which seek profound understanding of urban phenomena and the built environment, only benefit from conceptual and intellectual cross-fertilization of interdisciplinary approaches. This special issue of the Annual of the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research aims at demonstrating the usefulness of such an open approach in furthering our understanding of many difficult and troublesome phenomena that burden our everyday lives.

The revelation that there is no universal answer to an actual question at the same time represents a critique of the current urban-architectural practices, which lack the idea of completeness and comprehensiveness of spatial action. In order to understand all the key aspects and factors of urban society, and to obtain and achieve quality and humane living spaces for people in the ‘modern’ society, the topics the authors in this special issue engage with involve propositions and world-views from theories in social science and are directly connected to environmental development and urban planning. The involvement of professionals from several different fields on the topic provides an opportunity for researchers to increase supervisory capacity, create collaborations in research projects, and

introduce creative practice research methodologies. The articles mainly address the topic from local perspective as the cases studied pertain on specific issues of the relationship between urban practice, urbanism, and theoretical approaches of the urban imaginary and urbanist conceptualization looking at particular at creation of public spaces in the cities in the region of South East Europe, but it is globally related topic to the processes of urban transformation, and urban innovation in the context of transitional societies.

This special issue contains five articles that aim at bridging a gaping hole in the approach to urban planning and citizens' urban practices. This schism exists because of incompatibility between the public and private interests that when set in motion eventually shape our cities and living environment at the expense of the former. This collection does not tackle directly the clash between the capital and the public interests of the citizens, but rather provides a conceptual framework to help grasp urban phenomena from a wider perspective, leading us to a meaningful understanding of urbanity, not confined merely to the technicality of urban planning, but the complexity of social interactions on a larger and greater scale, too. For example, invoking the urban commons should be self-explanatory, but it rather demands further elaboration when speaking with non-experts in the field, without any guarantees that it will resonate clearly even among those responsible for the designing and functioning of our cities. If we can help contribute towards bridging that gap would be the greatest satisfaction for this effort. In what follows is a brief introduction of each of the articles and the main issues they analyze.

We open with a text by Nikola Georgievski on the reading of territory, followed by a practical example of symbolic, but also social, economic, and political, hence, symbolic transformation of a public space in Belgrade by Srdjan Radović. The third article is by Elena Koprtla that offers a cultural studies perspective and looks at the interplay of the urban landscapes and cinematography and how they co-produce urban identity. After these more theoretically inclined papers, which provide a rich toolbox for further analysis of urban phenomena, two more texts, grounded on more particular examples from Skopje, Macedonia provide valuable explorations of "holistic" architectural approach, the one that takes in account, seriously, the social aspect of urban interventions in the built environment in agreement with citizens needs and uses. Silvija Shaleva looks at the urban voids, while Mirjana Lozanovska interrogates the abandoned industrial sites. Both articles are based on research in Skopje.

The very understanding of the territory, as a quintessential concept for the whole enterprise of urban studies, or urban planning particularly and it is thoroughly explored in Georgievski's contribution to this issue. Pressing for a broadened conceptualization of the territory as urged by the transition of the craft of architecture from design field to one of a social science discipline, while accepting the undeniable influence of the built environment in human societies, Georgievski offers three approaches to reading of territory. The first is the poetic, or metaphorical and subjective reading of the territory as per Solà-Morales in "Terrain Vague" (1995). The second reading is formal and here by calling upon Gregotti (1981), Georgievski explains the process of reaching an understanding of the anthropogeographical origins of the terrain with the better-defined role of the architect as a creator of functions, not of forms, while creating the landscape, once it is understood that the building is not just a product of an architect and that we must embrace wider understanding of the architectural projects beyond the linear trajectory of concept, analysis, and project. After

we establish classificatory division of the terrain in distinguishable fields it allows us to approach creatively the semantic reading of the terrain and to comprehend it as an ensemble created within a human - nature interplay. Finally, thus expanded understanding of the role of urbanism, it summons the programmatic role of architecture, as envisioned by Koolhaas, (1997) with a paradigmatic shift from creation of stable and fixed objects to one of fluidity and change in the landscape.

Whatever the academic and professional advances may intend to bring to the practice of urban planning in democratically insufficient states, some traditional, or even atavistic drives seem to prevail as the decision making is shifted towards the power holders and away from the citizens. This allows for expression of political ideologies in the public space. The intention to produce a fixed meaning in space is particularly present in the nationalist ideology and when given a chance, the nationalists insist on inscribing the public space with signs that supposedly permanently mark the dominance of their nation on that territory. We have seen that happening in Macedonia with the nationalist remaking of the capital city with the infamous project “Skopje 2014”, but we see it also just to the north of Macedonia in neighboring Serbia. Radović’s contribution to this volume speaks exactly of these processes where fluidity is tamed by nationalist fixity. Even the name of the space under scrutiny in the article reflects this process, so from vernacular term Štajga (with roots in German steigen – to climb, off and on, as in and out of trains, as it was the main railway and train station in Belgrade), later officially named the Square of Brotherhood and Unity, reflecting the ideologically loaded concept of socialist multiculturalism, to geographically derived Savski Trg (Sava river Square) aiming to neutralize the socialist legacy. Most importantly, it is now a site that hosts the biggest monument erected in Serbia, a 27 meter high sculpture of Stefan Nemanja, the founder of the most famous Serbian medieval dynasty. Radović offers rich analysis of the wider urbanistic, economic as well as the political transformations that led to this outcome and by diachronic presentation of its numerous developmental phases through modernity, post-modernity, to super modernity, that results with the triumph of the nationalist kitch.

The interplay, or interrelatedness of urban space and identity is in the main focus of Koprta when discussing it in this volume from the perspective of cinematographic treatment of cities. Theoretical approaches from both cultural/film studies and urban theories craftily interwoven in this article, produce enriching analysis of the urban space and explain the shaping of identity through films. Koprta approaches the urban imaginary and urban identity through a camera lens in films produced in post-socialist former Yugoslav lands. She points out the importance of visual representations and the power of images in identity formation. The post-socialist period of transition was marked by social disintegration, political confusion, and cultural ambiguity and Koprta observed that the frequent use of urban spaces of abandonment, neglect and murky transformation and urban decay in the films from this period was used for a successful portrayal of the prevailing social conditions in the region.

Shaleva turns her gaze to those ambiguous and decaying spaces, the urban voids, and proposes creative and productive approaches for their transformation. By rightly pointing out the notion of urban commons as, not only just and fair, but also most reasonable solution for those urban voids, Shaleva guides us through the cutting edge literature on the topic from both architecture and social sciences and provides the examples from real life, such as Berlin

and Skopje, one positively resolved, the other still in limbo. We are led from theoretical observations about public space and the role of the architecture in shaping the city to the perspective of participatory urbanism and other most advanced views and practices, best summed up with the conceptualization of architecture as a mediator.

Also insistent on the participatory approach is Lozanovska who analyzes the problem of another type of urban voids, the abandoned industrial sites in Skopje. Equally well informed and very informative is her use of the most relevant literature, focusing on the assessment of the level of participatory engagement of the local inhabitants in urban planning. She lists the consequences, positive or negative, that accompany its full application, or total neglect as is the case in the chosen site, the former Kuprum factory. Skopje was being developed as an industrial city during socialism and the collapse of Yugoslavia crumbled that economic system alongside the industrial complex that supported it. These ghostly industrial sites are left to decay for decades and as of recently the capital has been mobilized to turn them into lucrative residential and commercial buildings, often at the cost of the well-being of the neighborhoods where they are located while totally neglecting the needs of the local inhabitants.

We have invited our contributors to explore how the processes of politics and ideology affect the living experience in the city and its inhabitants, and how the cultural and ethnic differences made an impact on the public, and environmental development. The entire complexity of related and interwoven phenomena cannot be properly dealt with, even when a dedicated special issue allows for it, but we hope that we managed to contribute, at least modestly, to improved understanding of the possible paths that would lead us towards more comprehensive urban planning. Emerging from this collection is the need for envisioning the urban phenomena as urban social practice, not a playing field for lego architecture, nor as a battlefield for corrupted construction industry investors and administration, as it is the case in Skopje, the hometown of most of the contributors to this volume, who work and are educated in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Copenhagen, and as in the similar case in neighboring Serbia, in Belgrade, presented here.

Without invoking, the somehow worn out, battle cry of urban activists, the right to the city, but hoping that this special issue manages to make it clear that it should be established fact, accepted and acknowledged by all the relevant factors in the society for the construction of livable, pleasant, and clean cities. This seems to be at odds with the pressure of the private capital to keep on building and the private interests for profit that exploit the public space, appropriating it and neglecting the common interest. This is not an ideological battle between those who are right and left, or right or wrong, as we all will continue to suffer the negative consequences of poorly conceived planning and the continuing exclusion of the citizens from the decision making processes that affect the future of our cities. We managed to pollute our cities to record levels and we and the future generations will be paying with our and their health all those ill-conceived decisions. Here we must add the nationalist symbolic pollution of our cities that insistently neglects the long-standing diversity. Diversity that has always been the main characteristic of urbanity and of this region in particular and is under assault by the nationalist symbolic reordering of the public spaces, making the cities semantically ineligible, or uninviting for the many with whom we share them.

These and many other post-socialist cities are post-industrial cities simultaneously and despite the de-industrialization they suffocate their citizens by uncontrolled densification,

poor public transport and overcrowded, car infested roads and pavements, that leave no space for pedestrians and cyclists, nor for wheelchairs or baby prams. The devastating loss of green spaces and the epidemic energetic poverty are a reason even more compelling for immediate rethinking of established urban (non)planning practices that must be remedied at once, without hesitation. We remain hopeful that the points raised in these articles and the critical literature that they are based upon will become at least a starting point for better informed development of our cities.

**Guest Editorial**

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