

Historic City protection vs Resilient City transformation

The Case of Skopje's Old Bazaar

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Abstract

The city of Skopje is a result of dialectical contradictions of diachronically different concepts of development and superimposed planning concepts of unfinished layers. The Old Bazaar represents one of the oldest urban fragments and shows a strong resilience and capacity to overcome numerous disastrous events. Unfortunately, due to the development constraints set by the preservation measures, and speculative building actions in the context, it is gradually but progressively losing its cultural identity and role as a creative socio-economic hub. Weak development policies and non-adaptive preservation regulations to changing environment and socio-economic development are urging actions to adopt new regeneration measures and appropriate approaches that could bring life into the valuable cultural heritage setting. Existing patterns emerging from the unique uses and spatiality of the Old Bazaar, as an exclusive area of commercial use and traditional urban fabric of cultural heritage, have to be preserved, but simultaneously it is important to introduce novel tools for applied creative industries and adaptive re-use of the building heritage. All efforts of appropriation of the cultural heritage area of the Old Bazaar according to the new sustainable and equitable economic opportunities, should be carefully tested and implemented in the context, in order to avoid any socio-environmental decay.

Keywords

cultural heritage areas, resilient preservation processes, creative industries, adaptive use, circular governance

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INTRODUCTION

The neoliberal hegemony, processes of globalization, rapid urbanization and usurpation of urban space imposed shifting urban planning policies to focus on using resilience in the context of urban environments. This buzzword highlights a conceptual framework for actions toward reconstruction, redevelopment, preservation and adaptation of the urban developments to climate changes and possible severe impact on the sustainability. Albeit the concept of resilience refers primarily to spatial, environmental and socio-economic dimensions of urban sustainability as a response to the rapid climate change, this initial definition is broadened when being applied to the built cultural heritage areas accordingly to the specific actions needed.

Preservation and promotion of the identity and original values of the cultural heritage areas bring forward actions which must be actively engaged in preventing degradation, adjusting, and overcoming weariness at several levels: spatial, technological, normative and functional. Following this premise, a double folded approach is required for the cultural heritage areas protection: an objective understanding of the inherent qualities which have made the cultural heritage area resilient to past transformations, and the identification of new strategies which would enable and foster its resilience in the future.

Due to the political, societal and economic shifts in the country in the last 30 years, it was imposed on the city of Skopje to adjust to all new complexities and scenarios regarding its urban development. In the post-socialist society development new approaches and shifting paradigms, such as division of powers and participatory planning, integration and interdisciplinarity in the urban planning realm, have become relevant.

The Old Bazaar area experiences shared local governance between two municipalities (Centar and Chair), but due to the dual nature of the municipal system in Skopje, both the city of Skopje and the two municipalities have shared authority over the area, as well. In addition, it falls under central government jurisdiction over preservation and protection regulations and building permits, which in the context of missing cooperation creates circumstances of overlapping actions of different authorities, and a situation of over-regulated and restricted development actions while, on another hand. There is a missing concern and a situation of operational vacuum and standstill, with no clear vision for the enhancement of the social, ethnic and territorial cohesion, participatory governance, as well as direct financial investments and technical support.

Because of the imposed over-protective regulations on the area, private investments in the development are discouraged, but the unwillingness of the authorities to engage innovative approaches, mechanisms and financial support to the local arts and crafts or creative industries development, as well, makes the whole process of sensible economic development in a protective manner agonizing instead of challenging. The local governments, and especially the owners and developers when submitting requests for development, show little awareness of the values of the protected architectural and cultural heritage area. In this situation of maintaining the status quo of the protected area, activities of informal, illegal, aggressive appropriation and inappropriate structures have emerged in the area with a strong identity.



Fig. 1. Strict regulations vs. loose control leads to informal and illegal appropriations

The historic urban areas are associated with their significance as agents of collective memory and the main containers of the cultural achievements of the communities. They are the main generators of cultural identity, and in most cases, real attractors that house important cultural and other public institutions. In this regard, the goal of the heritage-led regeneration process should create a stimulating environment for creative, innovative and inclusive economic and spatial practices in a historic part of the city, while providing visibility and new life to the complex historic layers of the area.



Fig. 2. Skopje's Old Bazaar and its wider area

THE OLD BAZAAR AREA AND MORPHOLOGY

Skopje's Old Bazaar, one of the biggest complex web like bazaars of medieval oriental character in the Balkans¹, is the first and to date the only historic area that was proclaimed by law in 2008 a "Cultural Heritage of Significant Importance". Skopje's Old Bazaar was evaluated as a cultural heritage of the highest importance and its urban regeneration was considered essential in revitalizing and reviving its historic, cultural and economic value.



Fig. 3. Old Bazaar's characteristic streetscapes

The Old Bazaar area is part of the historic wider area which is centrally positioned in the city of Skopje, and it is comprised of several distinctive and adjacent urban parts including, besides the Old Bazaar, the Medieval City Fortress, the main city open-air green market, the Cultural centre with the National Opera and Ballet, and other cultural institutions: six museums, four theatres and four galleries, as well as different commercial and entrepreneurial models from a small artisan workshop to a large software development company.

The nucleus of today's Old Bazaar was generated in the medieval period, in the 12th century when provisional shelters for traders along the east wall of the fortification, in the Lower town were turned gradually into shops of temporary construction. The Old Bazaar urban morphology² was defined by the typical medieval irregular, organic town model of urban form growth, in which scattered public buildings in the irregular urban fabric are stable urban form elements, while fragmented zones and urban blocks with vernacular units along the irregular street network of narrow alleyways follow the topography in geomorphological manner. This specific Ottoman urbanism urban morphology is mostly preserved to this day. At present, the remaining elements and units date back from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, while the public buildings, most of which are considered monuments of culture and date from the older periods, managed to preserve more of their authenticity. In a process of uncontrolled urban growth, in the first half of the 20th century, many of the typical groups of shops and traditional streetscapes, interesting vernacular architecture details as well as traditional crafts, have been lost. Moreover, the large-scale reconstruction which has been undertaken after the earthquake of 1963, al-

though greatly improving the infrastructure within the district, introduced new artificial materials (such as reinforced concrete), as well as narrowing the access to the focal points and vistas imperceptible.

The vernacular-built form of small urban blocks and grouped shops are site-specific architectural expressions. They are built as a direct response to the exclusively commercial use and crafts production of the Bazaar's area, and to the inherent behaviour patterns. General characteristic of the historic built area is the distinctiveness of each unit formation, each one leading to an individual solution and response to the needs of the owners, conditions of the location and social interaction patterns, which in the process of architectural and urban design is conceived as a unique challenge.

The irregular, organic fabric and built form of the Bazaar consists of numerous compatible and complementary uses of trade/commerce/craft building parcels of high density. Sitting on the building line they define the street front with its main façade, while attached parcels in a perimeter manner form the urban blocks and dominant built morphology of the Bazaar. There are several types of blocks in the Bazaar: a perimeter block with a public building (most commonly a Hann) with a central atrium; a perimeter block with a small inner yard; a fully built perimeter block with no free space and a semi-open perimeter block with an accessible inner yard. The most distinctive composition and perceptual reference point are the sacral and profane monumental buildings, especially the so-called Triade composition in the Ottoman urbanism, consisting of a mosque, a hammam and a han (inn). Most of the bigger Bazaars, in which category is the one in Skopje, have a Bezisten, as well (a typology of grouped-in-one building shops).

DEVELOPMENT OF THE OLD BAZAAR AND PRESERVATION MEASURES

Diachronically, the development of the Bazaar could be divided into three main periods. The first started with the occupation of Skopje by the Ottomans in 1392 and lasted until the great fire of 1689, which was set by the Austrian Army. From this period the Bazaar originates as a typical spatial and commercial development. The second period coincides with the rapid modernization of the Ottoman Empire through the Tanzimat reforms from 1839 to 1876, which were set to revive the Bazaar and boost economic growth. The third period is a period of Western European influence in the 20th century.

The urban planning period in Skopje started at the turn of the 20th century (the first Urban Plan from 1914 by Dimitrije Leko and the second from 1929 by Josif Mihajlovich) and promoted radical changes in Skopje's urban structure by relocating the city centre to the right bank of the Vardar River, thus downgrading the significance of the Old Bazaar. Following the planning period after World War II, the plan by L. Kubesh from 1948 marked the Old Bazaar as a former centre and urban fragment. Nevertheless, the Bazaar remained an important commercial and cultural area and part of the city centre.

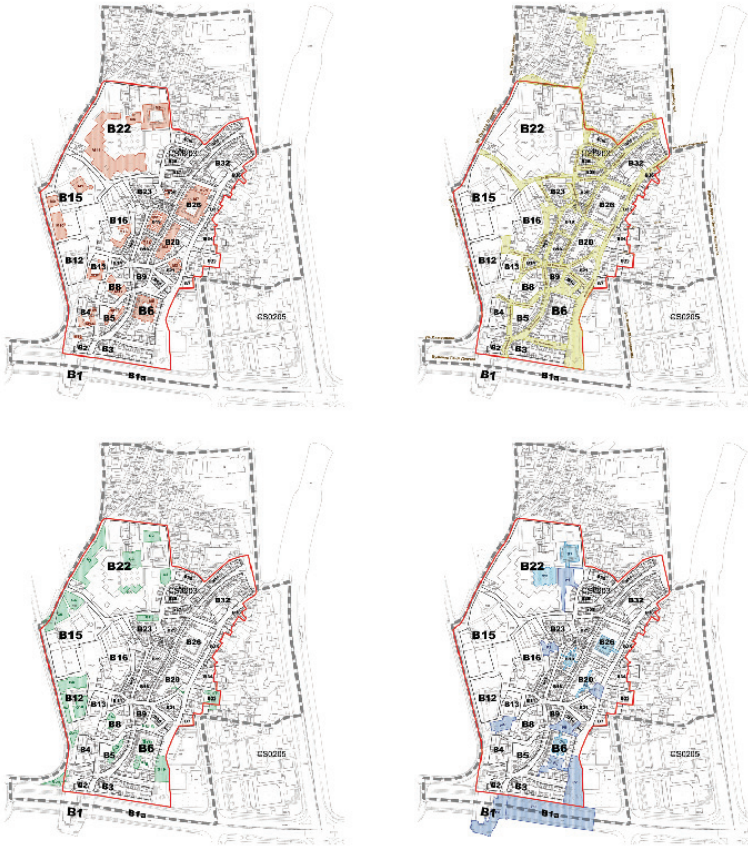


Fig. 4. Inventory by typology: cultural heritage monuments, street network, greenery, squares and semi-public spaces

The earthquake from 1963, as it usually happens with events of such a magnitude, marked and divided the periods of Skopje's development in pre-or post-fashion. The post-earthquake period of city urban planning and reconstruction activities concentrated on a much larger central territory, while the Old Bazaar was treated mostly as a protected building and cultural heritage area, integrated into the overall planning strategy of the time, but excluded from the main focus of interest or specific redevelopment guidelines. Although a more profound treatment of the Old Bazaar came into the focus of interest of the urban planning and preservation authorities much later, adjacent development of the city around the Old Bazaar's historic boundaries, with the new university complex, cluster of cultural institutions on the left bank of the River Vardar, new trade-commercial centre on the right bank of the River Vardar and the new road network, which intersected and disintegrated the Old Bazaar territory, heavily influenced the transformation of its social and urban fabric. The new plan for the city of Skopje centre development of Kenzo Tange displaced the historical central position of the Old Bazaar, redirecting the new axis development of the city with the commercial zone now organized on the right bank of the Vardar River.

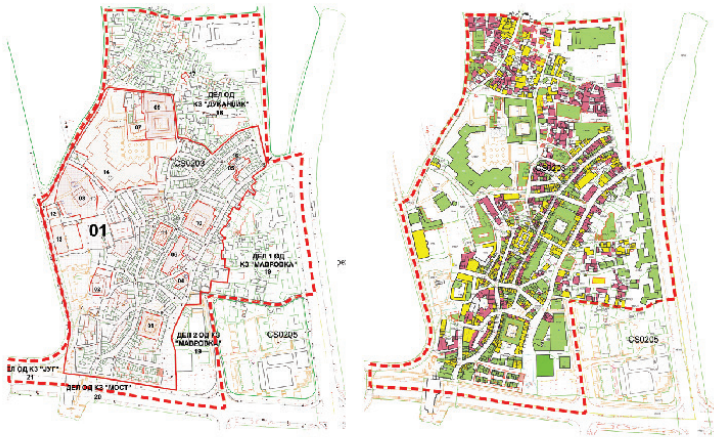


Fig. 5. Cultural heritage preservation documentation: cultural heritage protected area and its contact zones boundaries (on the left); Inventory of the building stock (on the right).

Later on, the area of Skopje's Old Bazaar was a subject of several studies and programmes for its revitalization, such as the *Program for a detailed urban plan for the Bazaar and Kale Fortress in Skopje* by Boris Chipan in 1967 published by the Institute of Urbanism and Architecture in Skopje, then in 1998 *A study on built heritage with program directions for the revitalization of the Old Bazaar* and in 2000 *A study on redefining values and the borders on the heritage monument the Old Bazaar*. In 2007-2008 the *Elaborate for the revalorization of the Old Skopje's Bazaar*, which in the end resulted in the creation of the Law for the Old Bazaar³ in which it was given a status of a cultural heritage area of significant importance. The adoption of this Law enabled permanent preservation of the values and authenticity of the Bazaar, creation of favourable conditions for the preservation of the integrity, building knowledge capacity and dissemination of the values of the Bazaar, its cultural, educational, scientific and other advantages for of the citizens, as well as prevention of actions that may cause damage or degradation. The Programme for the revitalization of the Bazaar, as part of the aforementioned law, was concentrated on urban rehabilitation as a method for the Old Bazaar revitalization. Of particular interest to the Programme is the physical space of the Bazaar and its architectural-urban protection and promotion, with emphasis on the following components: urban-morphological structure, street network and public spaces, architectural buildings and complexes, surrounding contact zones, communal infrastructure, traffic etc.

Presently, the boundaries of the registered and protected Old Bazaar area and its Contact zones have been clearly defined as was the protection and conservation regime specification of the blocks, open spaces and monuments in 3 categories: First degree (most important), Second degree (important) and Third degree (ambient value). The "Revalorization of Skopje's Old Bazaar Elaborate", which was prepared by the National Conservation Center-Skopje in September 2006, clearly defines the territory, conservation measures, and boundaries of the protected area and its contact zones.

The designated cultural heritage area of the Old Bazaar, although being under protection by a special Law, has been under continuous threat from a variety of economic, social and environmental pressures. The governance model currently in operation requires substantial economic resources and financial support, which comes mostly from a diminishing tax base. This traditional single custodian model of cultural heritage management faces challenges for the long-term sustainability and resiliency of the Old Bazaar.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR THE REVITALIZATION OF THE OLD BAZAAR

It is obvious that alternative approaches to the Old Bazaar's governance and management are needed for a more inclusive revitalization process to be achieved. These new approaches require transparency and circular processes in terms of attracting multiple stakeholders to get engaged in inclusive decision making and shared long-standing responsibility. These alternative approaches should comply with several principles if the intention is to be sustainable and successful in the long run, which are: All governing processes have to be open to all members of the society; It has to be of a participatory nature, aiming to encourage all the interested community members to engage in an open dialogue, while enabling inclusiveness by engaging a wide diversity of expertise and interests; Each decision-making process has to be transparent and easily understood from the outside, in order to enable new actors to be engaged with ease and participate in the long term; Each governing body must be held accountable for its actions and communicate with clear and concise information, thus building a foundation for mutual trust; All parties involved should be encouraged to new forms of partnerships among different actors through collaborative conceptualization, development, implementation and management.

To test out alternative approaches toward the governance of the Old Bazaar, and the possibilities available for sustainable collaboration and resilient development of the area, the Skopje Urban Living Lab (SkULL) was established, as a creative hub for different activities undertaken within the ROCK Horizon 2020 project. We will use and elaborate on some of the outcomes of the ROCK project, in which we have actively participated. In the framework of ROCK's systematic approach (a circular urban system), it was investigated how this cultural heritage is linked to the other policy areas (sustainable change mitigation, urban regeneration and adaptive re-use). ROCK project vision for Skopje was developed around the idea of transforming the historic area by promoting creative and technological supported spatial practices in a more resilient regeneration process based on a sustainable economy, by bringing different stakeholders together in creative collaborative living labs.

As the Old Bazaar historically has functioned as an area in which the concepts of sharing and collaboration were inherent and central to its spatial and functional resilience, it was only logical to try and build upon that tradition in the search for innovative ways of involvement of local stakeholders in the regeneration of the area, while at the same time preserving and revitalizing its social, economic and cultural diversity.



Fig. 6. SkULL as a creative hub for different activities and stakeholders' inclusion

Recent history shows numerous efforts in which the area of the Old Bazaar has been the subject of different short-lived initiatives and collaborative inclusion of different stakeholders, but unfortunately, as they have been poor in delivering the expected outcomes, most of them resulted in a considerable amount of distrust among the shop owners and other stakeholders, which affected possible outcomes of an urban living lab exercise, as well.

When developing the programme of activities, the starting point was to identify the constraints in the mutual coordination when applying new approaches to the policies and practices of the municipalities, other governmental bodies and public agencies. By carefully selected activities and open-to-debate-topics, in which different ROCK partners were involved, SkULL managed to regain the interest of the local shop owners, as well as of young people and other interested parties, who felt the potential of the area. Gradually, SkULL managed to become a platform

for distributing and acquiring information and to fully involve stakeholders in its activities. To enable the processes of co-creation, joint decision making and sharing responsibilities, the Laboratory created a network of local stakeholders and data infrastructure. It managed to start serving as a forum for dialogue and for testing new technologies, policies and solutions, which was and still is of utmost importance for the cultural heritage area's resilient transformation.

It was realised that the essence of creating an effective urban living lab necessitated the making of a network and data infrastructure, which could be shared among the local stakeholders and the ones responsible for the vitality of the Old Bazaar. Aiming at developing a local ecosystem of stakeholders, it was started by identifying all parties involved in the Old Bazaar regeneration. The collaborative nature of an urban living lab meant bringing together multiple stakeholders (researchers and artists, companies and the business community, NGOs, citizens, politicians and local government officials) who were to complement each other with their diversity of competencies, knowledge and skills, financial resources and political influence. This accomplishment is still considered one of SkULL's greatest successes.

It was evident that diminished cultural identity, phenomena of marginalization and degradation in the historic city, required new methods and approaches to design and to the complex dynamic systems of cultural heritage management. The majority of actions undertaken were related to the provision of new insight into the potential of the protected heritage area and to the exploring of new opportunities for qualitative spatial re-use and re-design of neglected, or underused areas and structures in the Old Bazaar. One of the main challenges was to develop a new perception of the area. Instead of conceiving the area as a mere tourist attraction, insisting on "conservation of the original" and ignoring the existing trend of ever-decreasing diversity of uses and crafts, it was suggested to foster re-use or insert new contents into the area, which would either support the crafts and uses that have survived, or introduce new compatible emerging creative industries. Moreover, the co-existence of differences was proposed as a leading paradigm in the process of cultural heritage preservation and revitalisation.

Based on the above-mentioned premises different scenarios and approaches have been tested aiming at finding new propositions and solutions for the redevelopment of the protected area of the Old Bazaar. The objective was to explore the potential of Old Bazaar territory in order to create new social and economic possibilities, by following the existing patterns of spatial and functional use, while simultaneously using creative industries and contemporary crafts for envisioning future development. These all have contributed to the important shift in comprehending the importance of civic engagement and a wide range of opportunities for different development and a fresh look at a resilient future.

SKULL proved to be a hub of actions, with initial potential to generate economic and technology-driven models for smart and creative urban environments with sound solutions at the local level. The main regeneration theme was concentrated on the possible transformation of the historic area into a knowledge, culture and technology-driven hub while introducing innovative businesses and working models. These propositions as outcomes of the organised workshop with the participants from the creative industries and ICT sector provided meaning and coherence both from the past and for the future social and economic development of the area.

CONCLUSION

An unprecedented acceleration of environmental, landscape and climate changes as well as cultural, economic and technology-driven modifications affects the sustainability of the cultural and building heritage protected area of the Old Bazaar. Between the two realities of possible development: the one which insists on conservation of the values and original character of the Old Bazaar, and the second, which adopts necessitate changes to new adaptive re-use, technological advances, and new models of working environments, certainly the new active regenerative approach toward development and resilient transformation of the area is much more sustainable.

We are witnessing in recent times that the area has fallen victim to the loosely controlled development processes influenced by strong market-oriented speculative actions, resulting in a gradual loss of its cultural identity and degradation of its built stock, but it is partly because of the over-regulated preservation measures or over-lapping authorities and miscommunication, as well.

The original qualities, which have shown real resilience to all transformations in the past and adaptation to changes, have endured and lasted longer than in any other historic area in the city, which as a lesson from the past development must be extended and stimulated as behaviour in the future.

The Skopje Urban Living Lab that was established as part of the ROCK Horizon project 2020 has demonstrated that the Old Bazaar was a productive testing ground for alternative ways of governing cultural heritage areas, The aim was to use the historic urban area and the cultural heritage as an arena for testing new, compatible with the protected area uses, technologies, solutions and policies, in the pursuit of a livable urban environment and participatory approaches. In the approach implemented during the living laboratory period, it was insisted on new perception to the protection of heritage, beyond perceiving historical city areas as mere touristic attractions submitted to the logic and mechanisms of consumption.

The adoption of regeneration measures, which utilize ICT advantages, include technologies and services in creating new ways of accessing or appropriation of the cultural heritage by avoiding socio-environmental decay while, taking into account market trends and new commercial opportunities, is challenging but the only possible progressive and active approach to preservation and regeneration of the Old Bazaar. This way heritage led regeneration process was certainly a real response to resilient transformations while, stimulated environments for creative, innovative and inclusive economic and spatial practices. The synergies between the technology and creative industries supported societal and economic regeneration, might be the right future development towards interaction between the local community of the Old Bazaar and new models of working in a socially inclusive process.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Elena Andonova has a master's degree from the Faculty of Architecture, University of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje and is currently working as a teaching assistant at the Institute of Urbanism at the same university. Elena has worked on numerous projects both in the private sector as well as on several awarded international competition entries mostly focusing on public spaces. Her interests are oriented toward exploring urban planning and its ties and influences to other social sciences in the neoliberal society.

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