THE CITY OF THE NEW NORMALITY, THE EXAMPLE OF SKOPJE

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ABSTRACT: In the period of the post-earthquake reconstruction, it was stated that Skopje should face the "new normality" of the city. Sixty years later, "new normality" is becoming a global phenomenon in the face of the effects of the ongoing worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease.

It is becoming evident that the modern world is facing a variety of crises. Hence the need for our life environment to perceive and rethink in relation to a continuous possible crisis. The city of Skopje in its recent history has faced the catastrophic earthquake of 1963 and more recently the current pandemic. Both conditions caused changes in his daily life. But what are the similarities and differences between these critical thresholds? Can they contribute to dealing with future uncertain events? In the case of the earthquake, we follow visible consequences of its physical structure, in the case of the pandemic in its health condition, socio, cultural and economic structure. But in both cases the established normality has changed. This paper will explore precisely the consequences of crisis situations and will connect them in the continuous variability of the context of the contemporary city.

KEYWORDS: *new normality, city, crisis, post-earthquake recovery, post-pandemic recovery*

INTRODUCTION

In the United Nations report of the post-earthquake reconstruction of Skopje (1970) states that the city needs to face the "new normality". During the intensive reconstruction, it became clear that the desire to return, or to go back to the normal, usual way of life of before 1963, became more and more distant.

"Skopje was beginning to realize that it would never experience the normality of the days before the earthquake. To return to a certain level of prosperity, with the means to deal with future growth, it will have to get used to a new normality, rejecting many features of its traditional lifestyles and coming to terms with modern technology. This adjustment takes time, and this was the case in Skopje, demonstrated by the way in which pedestrians continued to ignore the existence of their dispersed city motor traffic (United Nations, 1970, p.101).

Sixty years later, "new normality" is becoming a global phenomenon in the face of the effects of the ongoing worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease. Thus, the "new normality" has become a metaphor for the way we deal with multiple crisis situations.

The more and more intense, more diverse and more uncertain changes cause the need to rethink the attitude of man towards the environment, especially towards the urban constitutions, the way of their functioning and also defining the spatial and program structure. In the context of growing social, economic, cultural, environmental changes, our habitat and our attitude towards the environment acquires different properties.

Faced with the changing conditions and the pronounced urban transformation, this research examines the limits of architecture as a physical, spatial and programmatic permanence and the need of the practice for continuous updating of its relevance. The state of crisis demand re-examination of all the values, hence the need for perceiving and rethinking our life environment in relation to a possible continuous crisis.

This research refers to two key cases in the history of Skopje. In its recent history, Skopje has faced the catastrophic earthquake of 1963 and more recently the current pandemic of 2020/2021. Both conditions caused changes in its daily life. In a one-year period, through selected events we will follow the procedures of reconstruction and change of the city from 1963/1964 and 2020/2021. This episode may lead us to some of the key questions: What is happening to the city in crisis? What are the similarities and the differences between these critical thresholds? How can they contribute to dealing with future uncertain events?

1963/1964

The catastrophic earthquake of 1963 in Skopje was a turning point in the history of the city. Between 1000-1100 inhabitants died, 70% of the housing area was destroyed and 150.000 inhabitants or three quarter of the population of the city were left homeless. There was a need for a quick response to find ways and forms to meet the housing needs for a large number of people. Skopje became a city of solidarity and as a part of the reconstruction, the prefabricated houses, the barracks, became the main actors, an essential part in the reconstruction of the city. In addition to the symbolic and representative renewal of the city, the reconstruction through prefabricated houses, barracks, has become the most quantitative urban undertaking in the city of Skopje. In that sense, the barracks have become one of the most significant legacy of the post-earthquake reconstruction of the city and at the same time

the least explored. While other segments of the reconstruction of the city are legible, the barracks, due to their temporary character are increasingly disappearing or are subject to a continuous and intensive transformation (Papasterevski, Tasic, Bakalcev, 2021).

CHRONOLOGY

One of the first tasks of the reconstruction of the city of Skopje was the construction of 13 suburban settlements from prefabricated units, provided for 70.000 inhabitants (according to some sources, 17 settlements are listed, United Nations, 1970). There have been built 14.000 prefabricated housing units supplemented with public buildings and infrastructure network of 120 km of local roads, sewerage and water supply system (Matkovski,2014).

One week after the earthquake, on the anniversary of the national holiday Ilinden, the Executive Council of the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party at a meeting in Brioni appealed to the entire nation to help rebuild Skopje within five years. One week later, the federal Executive Council set goal for accommodating 120.000 citizens of Skoje by the end of the same year, 50.000 in renovated households and 70.000 in prefabricated homes. (United Nations, 1970).

The first delivery of prefabricated units arrived 10 days after the earthquake. Three months after that, the construction work on the prefabricated neighborhoods was under way and 10.000 housing units were handed over by December. By the end of 1964, 14.068 prefabricated housing units for 70.000 people had been set up. The majority of the prefabricated units were erected in the first phase of reconstruction of the city, 82% were produced in Yugoslavia and the remaining 11.5% were imported by order of the Yugoslav Government (United Nation, 1970).

The reconstruction of Skopje is summarized in three phases. The first phase, lasts until 1964, concentrated on the reconstruction of essential services, production and provision of basic conditions for existence of the population, providing social and industrial needs and provide roof over the head of the population. The second phase, from 1965 to 1971, is a phase of planned reconstruction of the urban reality according to the new master plan and the involvement of the Special Fund for Reconstruction of the City of Skopje within the United Nation Technical Assistance Program. The third phase from 1971 to 1981, focuses on the regional plan of Macedonia (United Nation, 1970).

SETTLEMENTS

August 5, 1963 at around 11:00 am, "in Gjorce Petrov, the President of the City Assembly of the City of Skopje, Comrade Blagoj Popov, in the presence of the highest republican politicians and a large number of youth brigades, stabbed the digger in the soft ground which until yesterday was a agricultural field and with that symbolic gesture marked the beginning of the construction of the first suburb of the New Skopje. Than the youth brigades started to trace the terrain on which prefabricated houses were later set up (Matkovski, 2014)."

That was the beginning of the great project of disposition of the prefabricated settlements as an extension of the existing city. Thus, the project of the linear city of Skopje, promoted since the 1950s, which was to redefine the existing radio-centric city from the first half of the twentieth century, received its material concretization (Bakalchev, 2004). A hypothetical vision of the post-war reconstruction of the city (1948) marked a new paradigm, a reversal from the existing radio-centric city to the new longitudinal city (Fig.1). This became possible only after the intensive extensions of the post-earthquake reconstruction of the city (1963/1964). The 13 planned

settlements mapped the territory of the new city through the east-west axial and the axial to the north. In that way, the figure of Skopje got the dominant extension, parallel tom the river Vardar, covering the hitherto distinctive settlements such as Gjorce Petrov, Taftalidze, Dracevo, Madzari in a single urban system.

The extension to the west consisted of the settlements: "Gjorce Petrov 1", "Gjorce Petrov 2", "Vlae", "Taftalidze", "Kozle" and "Zdanec".

The extension to the east on the right bank of the river Vardar consisted of the settlements: "Lisice" and the settlement of "Dracevo".

The extention on the east on the left bank of the river Vardar consisted of the settlements: "Madzari" and the settlement "Singjelic".

The extension to the north consisted of the settlements: "Zelezarnica", "Butel" and the settlement of "Suto Orizari".

Fig.1:

Skopje - linear city: General regulation plan of Skopje, 1948, from a group of Czechoslovakian authors

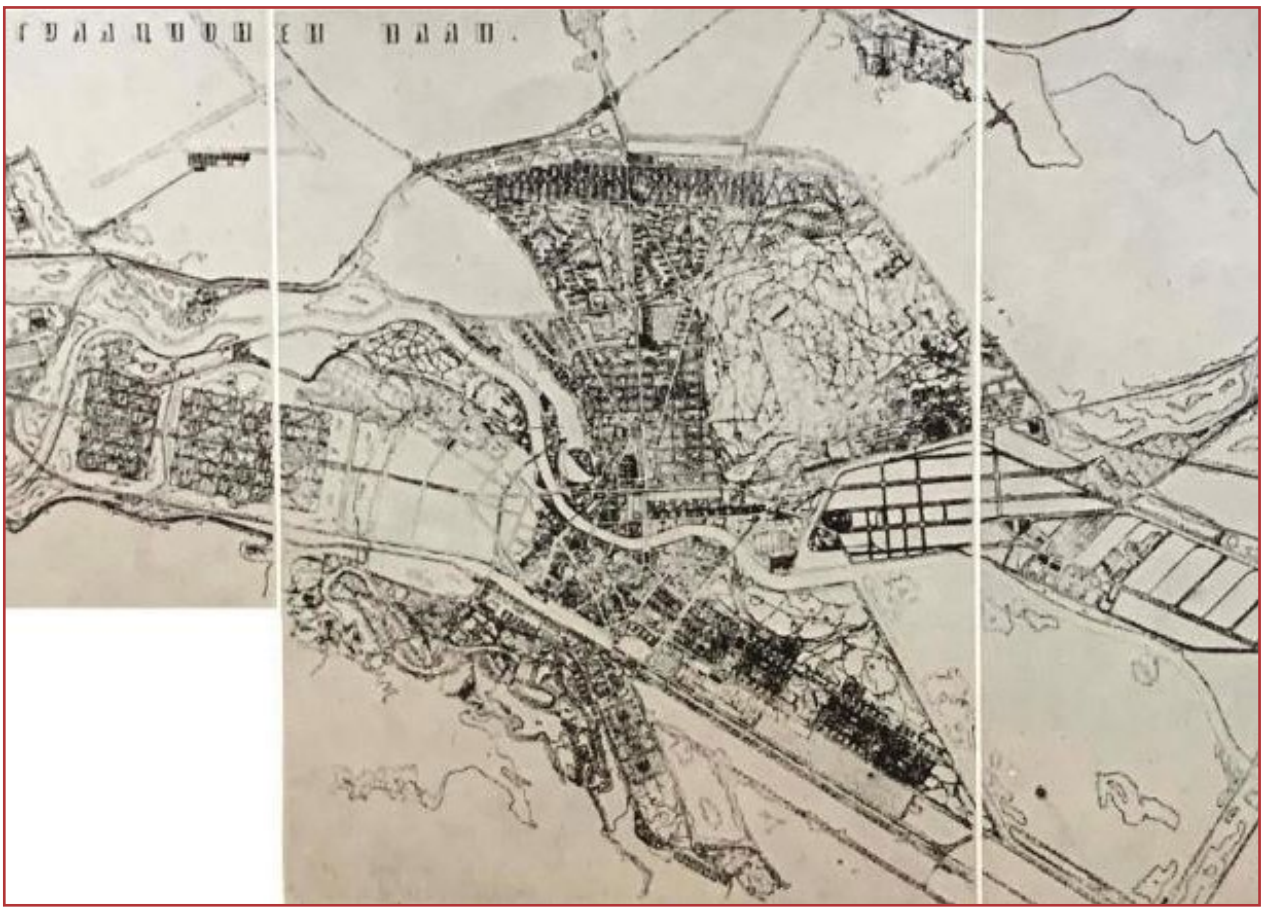
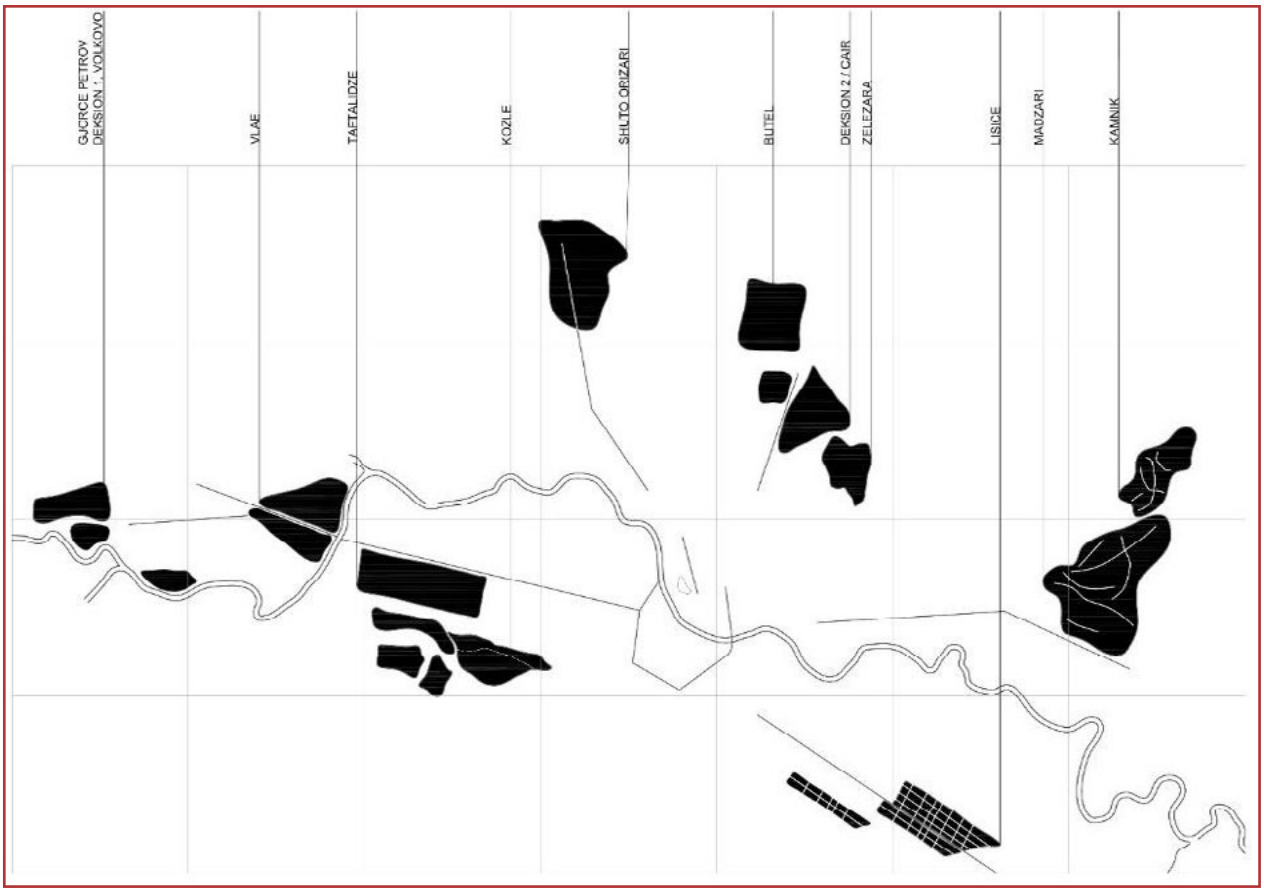


Fig.2

An archipelago of suburban fragments: reconstruction of the distribution of the prefabricated settlements in the Skopje valley 1963/1964.



Each of the Federal republics of Yugoslavia was obligated to contribute in the constructions of particular suburban settlements.

The low density of the dispersed prefabricated settlements meant an extension of the city up to 20 km compared to the existing compact city. The building area increased from 1200 ha in 1961 to 2500 ha in 1964. The intensity of this extension created a new changed perception of the city: "In the night panorama of the mountain Vodno, a parallelogram of a series of green street lights outline the new neighborhoods in vivid contrast with the intermingled orange lights of the old town - symbolically emphasizing the difference in urban form..." (United Nations, 1970). Contrary to the temporary character of the prefabricated houses, their imprint in the city in typo-morphological and social sense, left deep traces in the life of the city, in the new socio-cultural context that it generated.

BARRACKS, PREFABRICATED HOMES

Urban plans were the basis for the distribution of repeatable assembly units. In the period from 1963 to 1965, 17 new settlements were realized with a total of 14.000 prefabricated housing units with 50 different types from different manufacturers (Skopje City of Solidarity (1975). Fund for Reconstruction of Skopje.)

1. Gjorce Petrov 1 (140 units), 2. Gjorce Petrov 2 (700 units), 3. Vlae (1.001 units), 4. Taftalidze (1.169 units), 5. Kozle (1.052 units), 6. Vodno (208 units), 7. 11

October (341 units), 8. Lisice (1.022 units), 9. Dracevo (1.965 units), 10. Acetilenka (156 units), 11. Przino (256 units), 12. Butel (11.136 units), 13. Butel 2 (772 units), 14. Zelezara (491 units), 15. Madzari (1.801 units), 16. Suto Orizari (268 units), 17. Aerodrom (1.305 units).

The prefabricated units provided an elementary functional and spatial framework for living with the size of the apartments from 44.72m2 to 75.52m2, with an approximate size of the plots of 300m2 (Skopje City of Solidarity, 1975).

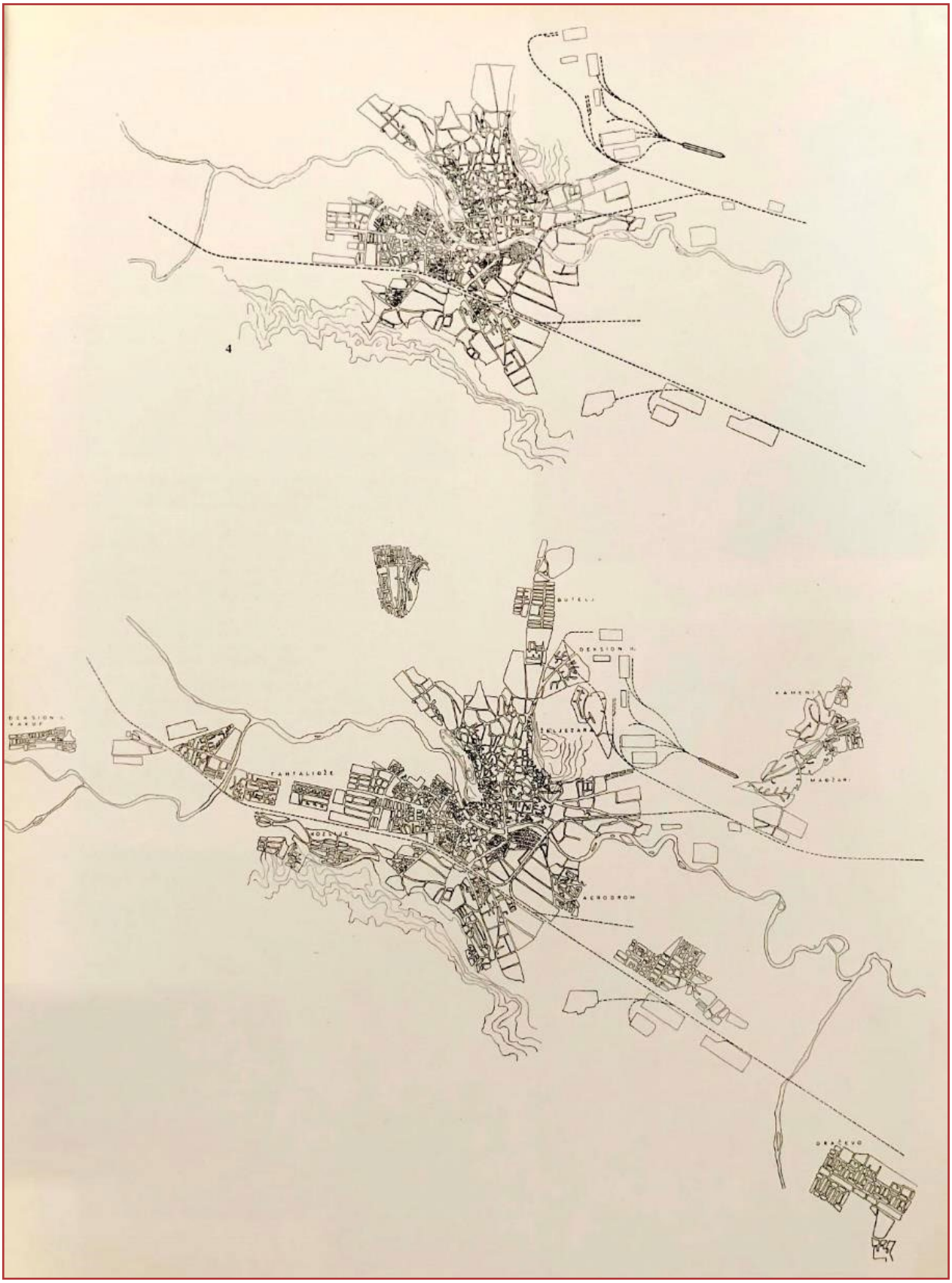
To the visitors of the United States, the newly built neighborhoods with their structure and program appear as a reminiscent of Levittowns, the model of suburban neighborhood (United Nations, 1970). In fact, the reminiscence of that imprint introduced a concrete basis for the new suburban life of Skopje.

The prefabricated settlements represent a territorial transformation of the city environment as a consequence of the city extension into a new suburban landscape. These neighborhoods, since the beginning, with all their affiliate programs, were conceived as a "separate and self-sufficient urban domain", similar to the suburban schemes in the US (Rowe, 1991). They are connected to the city but they are not an autonomous part of the city, unlike the parts of the traditional monocentric system. At a morphological level they are aggregation of repetitive units, yards and houses. The global image of an ideal suburban life was projected through them, a stark contrast to the traditional typo-morphological schemes at an urban level and at the house level. It creates an essentially new spatial situation that on one hand connects us to the global suburban patterns, but on the other hand, places them in a different socio-cultural situation. This duality creates the specificity of these houses and settlements over time. They "stretched" the life of the city, but in return, became the basis for continuous transformations over time.

Within 18 months after the catastrophic earthquake with the completion of the first phase (December 1964), the project of prefabricated settlements was realized.

Fig.3

The plan of Skopje before the earthquake in 1963 and the extensions up until 1964 (Galic, Risto and Sokolov, Leonid (1964). Study for a new plan of Skopje, Arhitektura Urbanizam, 28).



This system of separate settlements enabled their parallel construction with the reconstruction of the inner city as well as parallel work of several design and operational groups. Different sources have made these settlements different in their appearance. The orthogonal grid was predominant along with some displacements, fragmentations, as well as organic dispositions in relation to the context, the communication system or in relation to the topography of the terrain. The result was an archipelago of different textures scattered throughout the valley of Skopje.

Fig.4

Panorama of Skopje (the settlement of Kozle), a view from the mountain Vodno (Jankovic, 1964)

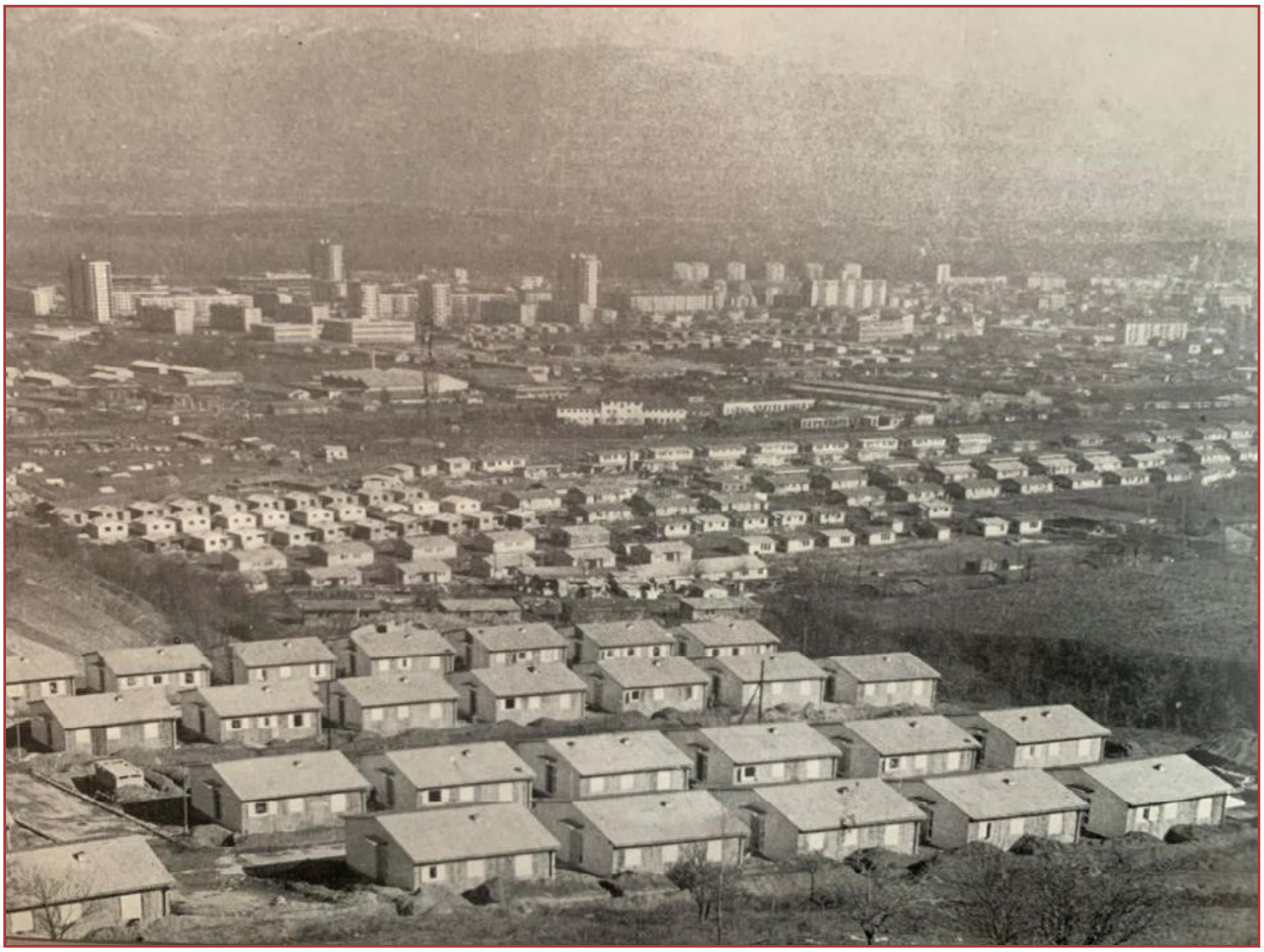
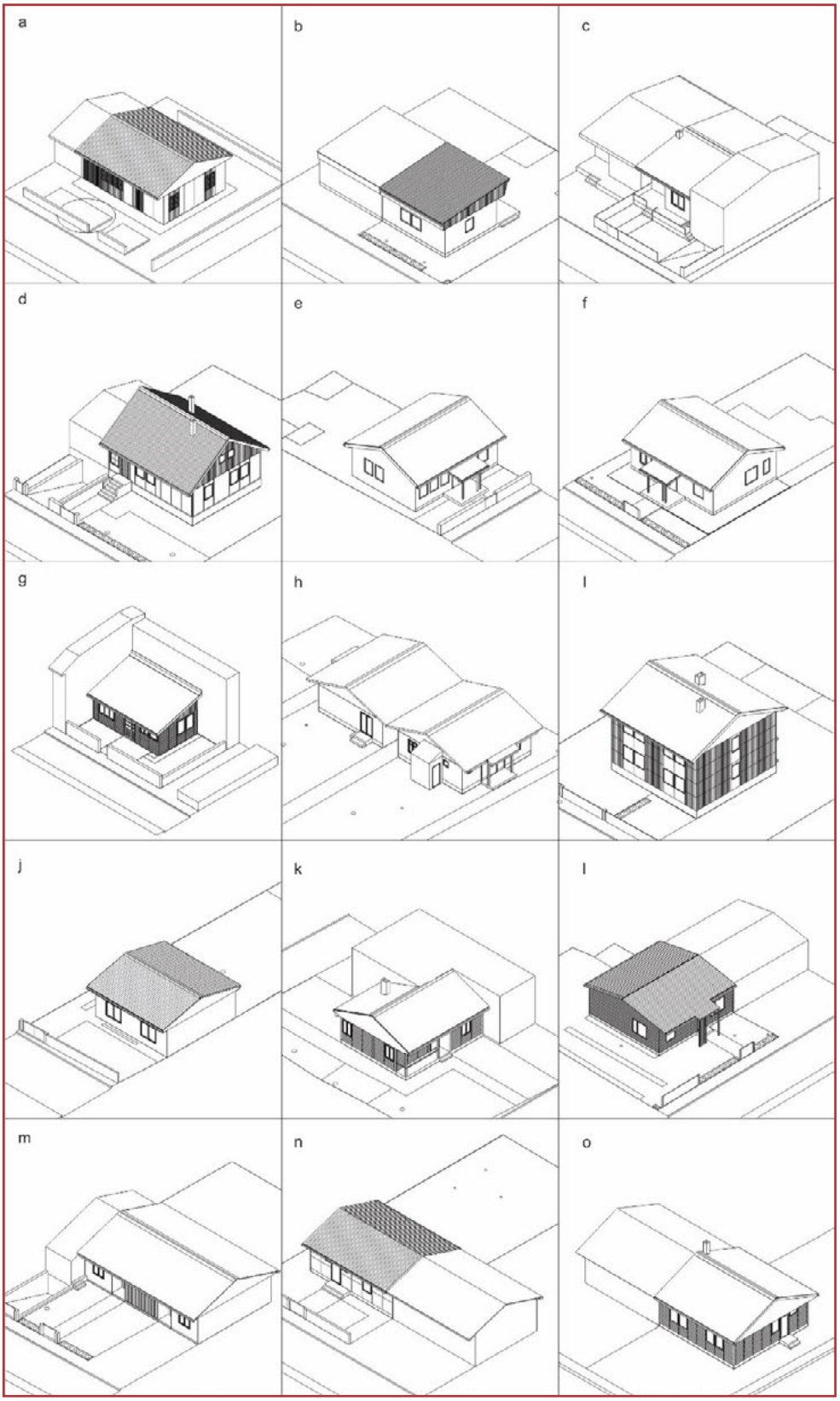


Fig.5

Selection of prefabricated units from 1963/1964 (documented 2018): a basis for the new spatial model of housing from the post-earthquake period of reconstruction of the city of Skopje (a. Taftalidze b. Kozle c. Zdanec d. Taftalidze e. Kozle f. Kozle g. Kozle h. Kozle i.Butel j. Butel k. Kisela Voda l. Lisice m. Lisice n. Dracevo o. Dracevo)



2020/2021

In the period of 2020/2021we were able to follow the local and global daily reports on the pandemic trend in the world. The coronavirus balance in Republic of North Macedonia for May 9, 2021 is:

Coronavirus Cases: 154.026

Deaths: 5.093

(https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/macedonia/)

The World Health Organization declared a state of emergency and international concern on January 30, 2020 and later declaring a pandemic on March 11, 2020. By May 9, 2020, more than 157 million cases had been confirmed, with more than 3.29 million deaths related to COVID-19, making it one of the deadliest in history. (WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19, 2020).

Recommended safety measures were introduced: social distancing, wearing protective masks in public, ventilating indoors, washing hands, covering the mouth when sneezing or coughing, disinfecting surfaces and monitoring self-isolation for people with or without symptoms. The COVID-19 pandemic in North Macedonia is part of the current global coronavirus pandemic 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The virus was confirmed to have reached North Macedonia in February 2020. (COVID-19 pandemic in North Macedonia). Physical distancing, evening curfew and further movement restrictions were introduced gradually, starting with closing the educational institutions and introducing the curfew during the day and evening, on weekdays and on weekends. Mobility restrictions were introduced, separating the young and the old to minimize the risk. Official recommendations on stricter restrictions were made after the president declared a month-long national emergency. (Policy responses for North Macedonia).

TIME EPISODES

In the period of March 2020 to March 2021, we will try to reconstruct the events that were introduced by the state authorities in response to the coronavirus. In doing so, we will single out those actions that led to the reduction of movement in the public space as the main measure taken in the fight against the pandemics. In a series of successive decisions, we will reconstruct the first three months (March, April, May) in which the movement restriction measures were promoted. In a form of a timeline, we will differentiate the basic trends: the introduction of the curfew and the time frame for movement, the differentiation in terms of age categories, older than 67 years and younger than 18 years; the period of permitted movement for pet owners and pets and the principled decisions that defined the behavior of the residents and their activity. (Fig.6).

In the first row we follow the movement restriction from 21:00 to 06:00, then 21:00 to 05:00 for workdays and 16:00 to 05:00 during the weekend. During April this limit is increased from 16:00 to 05:00 on weekdays and a complete lockdown on certain weekends from 16:00 on Friday to 05:00 on Monday or during key holidays.

In the second-row differentiation of the movement of separated age categories is introduced: people aged 67 and more are allowed to move freely in the period from 05:00 to 11:00, people under 18 are allowed to move freely from 12:00 to 15:00. This time values changed in terms of the length and the type of curfew introduced and in finally the age-related differentiation was terminated in May.

In the third row we follow the period of permitted movement for pet owners and pets. During March, movement in public

space is allowed from 20:00 to 23:00 at a distance of 100m from the home. Later that distance was increased to 200m. During April, with the changes of the global restrictions, the time intervals also change: 20:00 to 21:000 during the work days and 08:00 to 08:30 and 15:00 to 15:30 with a maximum distance of 100m, on weekends. In terms of key decisions, this series of sanctions start on March 13, 2020, when all shops, shopping malls, restaurants and other public gathering places are closed, whit the exception of groceries stores, markets and pharmacies (Policy Responses for North Macedonia).

Protocol for indoor spaces is introduced and a limit area of 20m2 per person. Position have been marked in front of each entrance or counter and from April 23 a mandatory wearing of a protective mask outside of homes (Policy Responses for North Macedonia). From May 27, the measures are loosened and the catering business is reopened.

Fig.6

Chronology of the time episodes of the curfew, differentiations of age categories, pets and the decisions that follow the implementation of sanction

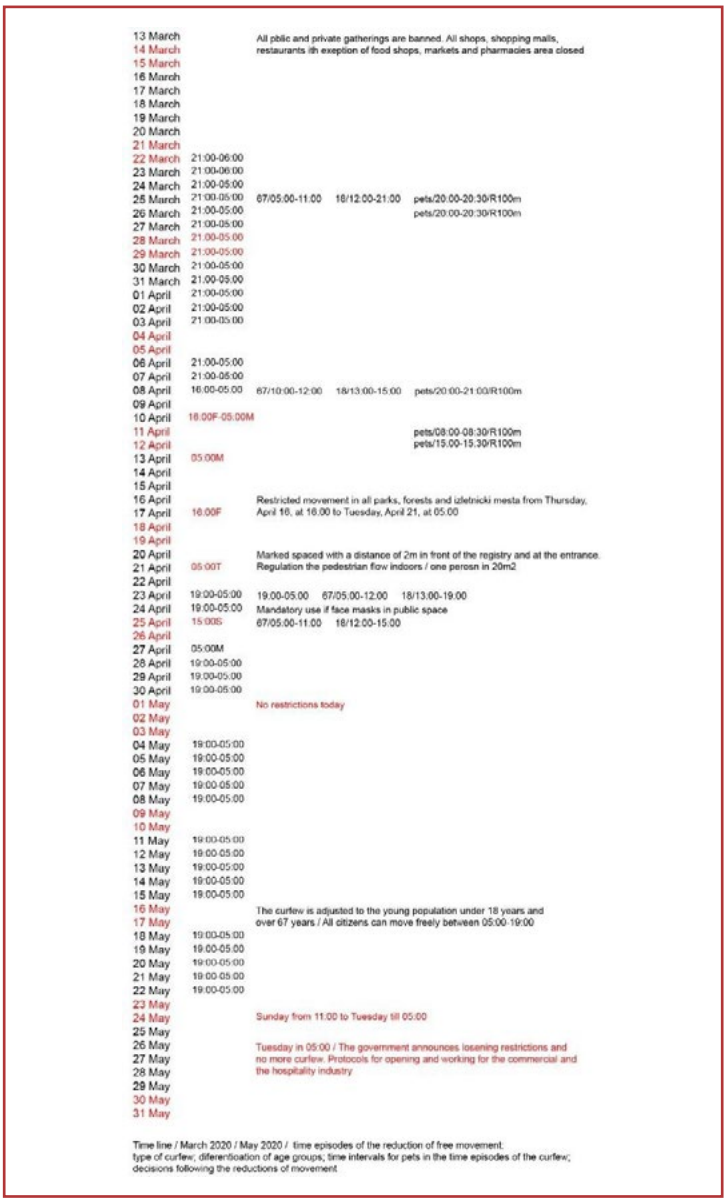
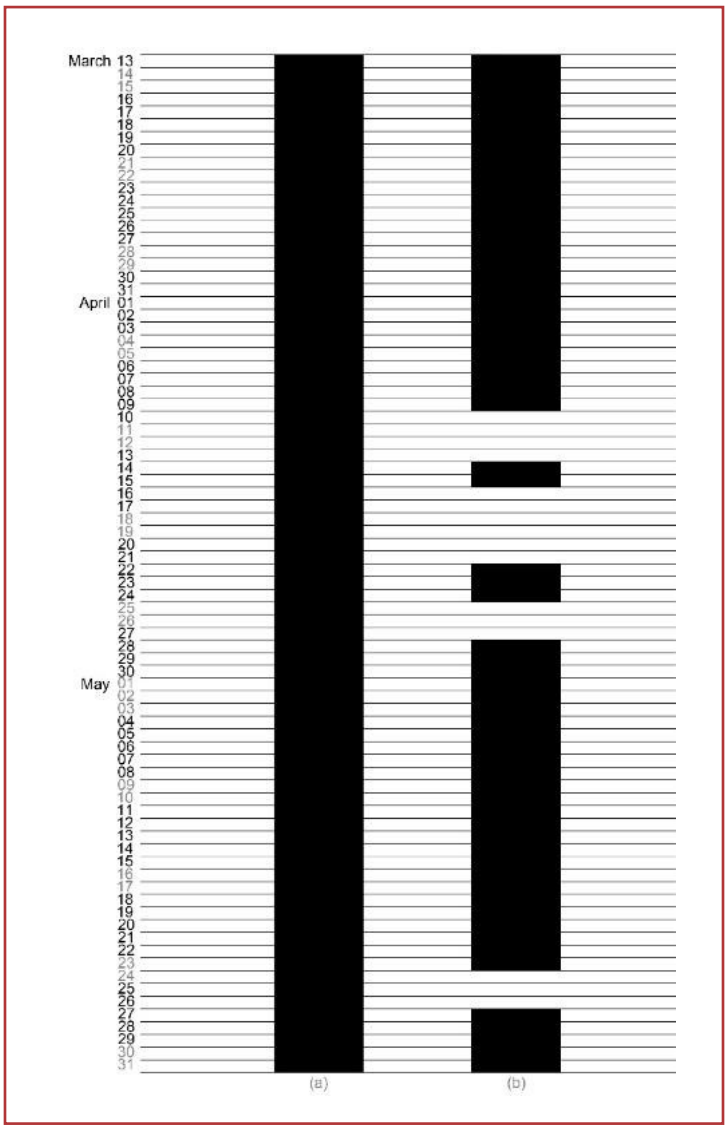


Fig.7

Diagram of two models of the city: (a) continuous city in the selected interval March / May and (b) fragmented city in the selected period of March / May



SPATIAL SITUATIONS

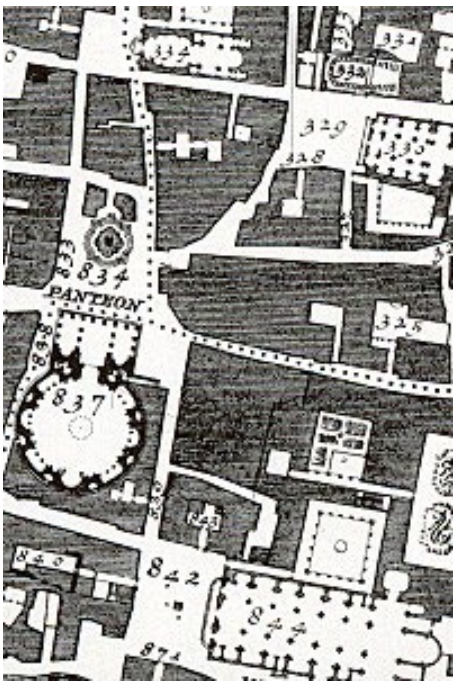
Throughout the chronology of the time intervals of the sanctions we can see the consequences of spatial situations. We will present the layers of the system of restrains through an urban fragment from the city of 100m X 200m (this were the distances allowed for movement of pets). The selected urban fragment is a part of the radio centric system of the city that borders the city ring to the east and the main axial east-west, north. It covers different periods from the 20th century. The general plan is from the first half of the 20th century with interpolations of the modernization from the 1960s as well as the last major housing and business intervention of the 1990s. (Fig.9).

The way we will present the different episodes is through the urban morphological representation of figure / background (Rowe, 1995, Moudon, 1994) referring to

the representation of Nolli's plan (Giambattista Nolli, 1748) (Roma Interrota, 2014). The city is presented as a system of continuous open public spaces in the anonymously bult mass. (Fig.8). These main public spaces are shown regardless of whether they are closed or open. In the case of the analysis of the selected fragment of Skopje, we will present the accessible open public space. Thus, we can see the initial figures of built and unbuilt as a inhabited system on the edges in a mutual interaction and dynamics. Next, we can extract the typical situations of the different episodes. The research can refer to all situations sequentially as a kind of animated form of relationships but in this research, we will determine the typical situations though which wee will see the principled relationship.

Fig.8:

Giambattista Nolli, 1748: Detail from the Nolli map, La Nuova Topografia di Roma, with representation of public space as a continuous form regardless of whether it is open or closed space. (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Nolli_detail_pantheon.jpg)



The general division of typical situations applies to the city during the day and the night. The day shows the synthetic situation during working hours and in a similar way the night shows the situation of inactivity. (Fig.10).

The initial situation is before the introduction of the restrictions, before March 13, 2020. In the daily situation we see the figures of the urban elements with the open borderline activities along the perimeter of the buildings towards the internal flows of traffic and pedestrians. The reconstructed condition before March 13, 2020, shows us a chain of activities along the perimeter of the figures of the built environment. The plinth of the built environment is inhabited with a series of various content, commercial, service and catering. In the night situation we clearly follow the separation of the open and closed space in which the activities in the plinth are excluded.

In the period after March 13, 2020, the picture is changing. The plinth activities during the day are also suspended. With the introduction of the curfew in the period of 21:00 to 05:00 on weekdays and/or 16:00 to 05:00 during the weekend, not only the borderline activities, but the entire open public space of the city is suspended. This images also appear in the daily situations in the periods of the total lockdown of the city on the weekends from 16:00 on Friday to 05:00 on Monday or during some holidays where the same measures were implemented. There are four situations, through the day and the night, which describe the relationship of the city through the selected fragment in this period.

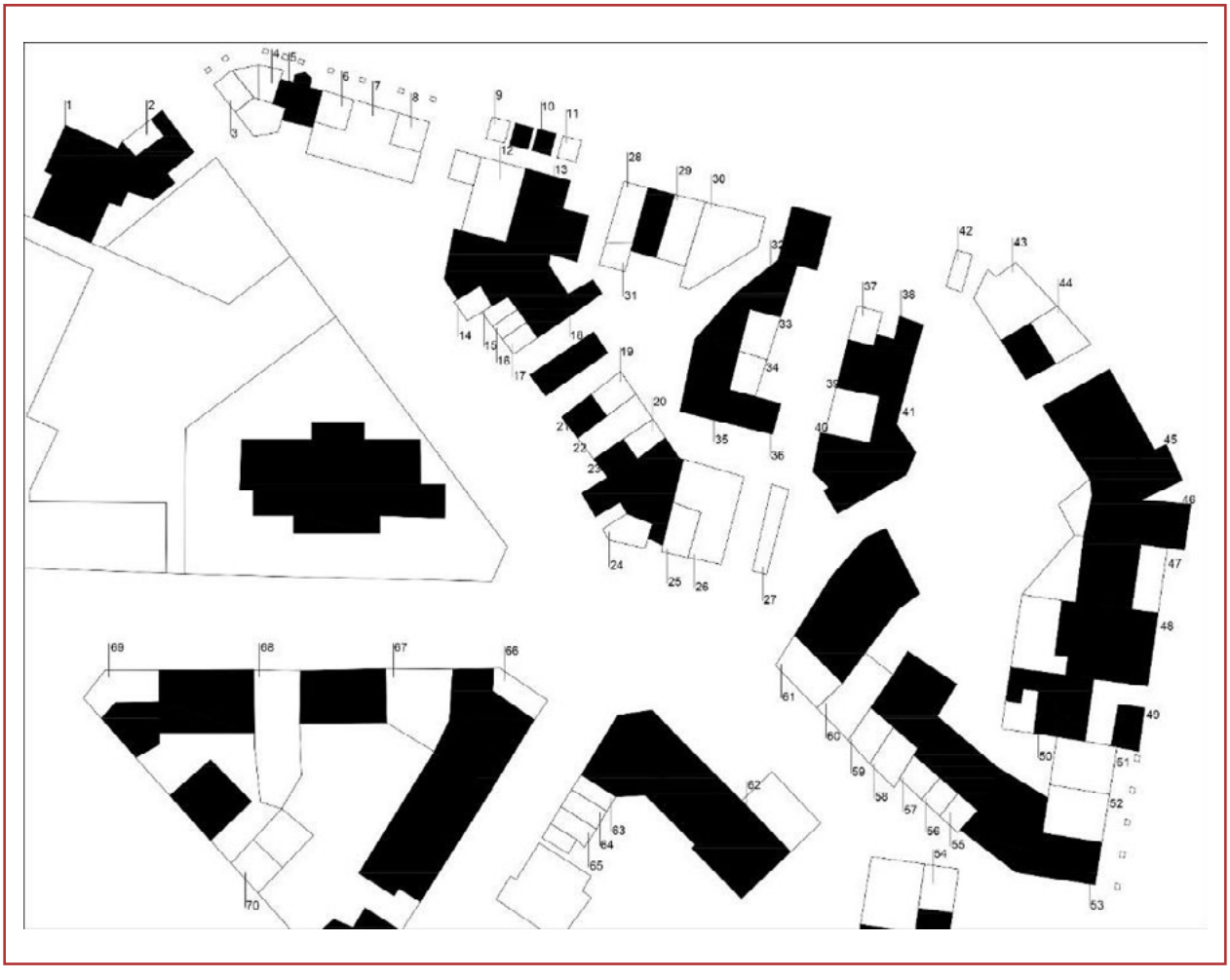
Throughout all these selected situations we clearly follow the closure of the city, as evident in the episodes and situations of the total lockdown. But it is in those periods that the question arises; what will happen in the dark zones when the human (anthropogenetic) factor is

largely excluded? In many articles from the period of total lockdown, beside the metaphysical depictions of empty cities, one factor became evident, that nature or the experience of nature returned to the cities, birds and song of the birds became present again in the cities (Watts, 2020 Jun 7; Harvey, 2020 Nov 17; Harvey, 2021, Mar 3). In the same way, a series of studies have examined the relationship between the human and anthropogenic factors of the human environment in relation to climate change and CO2 emission reduction during COVID-12 (Le Quéré et al., 2021; Usman et al. 2021). As in the effect of periods when snow falls on Aldo van Eyck (Tzonis, Lefebvre, 1999), and when the usual configurations of the city are lost in the white area and the city becomes a domain for children, in this case of a lockdown, the city returns to a certain primordial state.

1. Bakery DIMAN 2. Shoemaker SPANEC 3. Beauty salon GARDEN ROSE 4. Tobbacco shop 5. Fast food TOAST OFFICE 6. Mobile operator A1 7. Bookstore AKADEMSKA KNIGA 8. Bookstore / photocopy 9. KEY SERVICE 10. Grocery store 11. FOR RENT 12. Sports betting ZLATNA KOPACKA 13. Pub PORTA 14. Optics D 15. Seamstress salon SUZANA 16 16. Boutique MILO MISS 17. ANIMALS PET SHOP 18. Cafe FRAGARIA 19. Architecture Studio 20. SOLOPIZZA 21. Juice bar FRUTISIMO 22. Dog grooming TUTU 22 23. Vegan Fast Food HARMONIJA 24. Bou-

Fig.9

A sample of the city (100x200m): figure-ground representation with accessible open public spaces (April 2021).



tique LUNA 25. Photo Studio 26. CASINO SENATOR 27. FOR RENT 28. Court Translator 29. ALCUFE 30. Sports betting MOZZART 31. Gallery RIPIDA 32. BUONDI CAFÉ 33. VESPA 34. CANON 35. Night Club BALET 36. CAFÉ 37. Fast Credit 38. CAFÉ SHORT BUS 39. FOR RENT 40. Cafe VIA FELICE 41. Short Bus 42. Sports betting SPORT LIFE terrace 43. Sports betting SPORTLIFE 44. Boutique PRCLA 45. FOR RENT 46. Political club VMRO DPMNE 47. Beauty salon 48. Night Club VULCAN 49. FOR RENT 50. Inn HOUSE ALONG THE ROAD 51. ATELLIER SONJA 52. Boutique PAVIA 53. FOR RENT 54. Alcohol shop ALKOTEKA 55. Boutique 56. Bookstore GLADNO SRCE 57. FOR RENT 58. Hair Salon 59. Travel Agency 60. PET SHOP ARINA 61. Air Conditioning Shop 62. Café IZLET 63. CHOCO LIKE 64. Bicycle repair shop 65. ARTS HANDCRAFT ESNAF 66. FAST FOOD THAI BOX 67. FAST FOOD 7 68. Hotel ANI 69. SLATKOGRAM 70. Donut shop SLATKOGRAM

CONCLUSION

This research follows two lines of development of the city's reconstruction and behavior after and during certain crisis situations, the catastrophic earthquake of 1963 and the current pandemic of 2020. In both cases after these two key events, the city changes. In the post-earthquake period 1963/1964, an entire city was formed outside the historic city, in the period of one year from the pandemic 2020/2021, the internal spatial syntax was redefined. In the first case, we observed the changes at a city level, the selected frame is the Skopje valley, in which the historical core extends into an archipelago of urban fragments in the length of 20 km. Temporary buildings, prefabricated homes were the basis of the new territory of the city. The city is changing in a territorial sense but also in terms of the domestic landscape, the typology of housing, the spatial and program standards.

In the latter case, the pandemic response goes in the opposite direction, the city is contracted, the multitude of bans atomize society through successive spatial sequences. Through the lockdown, the continuity of the existing structure is changed by a series of interruptions of the usual spatial syntax in the public space, as well as the relationship between the public and the private space.

In both cases, the changes lead us to new opportunities, they are thresholds of opportunities through which the existing image of the city changes. Post-earthquake reconstruction is evident in the spatial character of the city in typo-morphological terms. But the period in the pandemic opens us up to different settings of the city in terms of its closure through time episodes and spatial sequences. In an obvious way, the city is shown not as a continuous spatial and programmatic permanence but as a series of program episodes of a given physical structure (Fig.7; Fig. 10).

The city of "new normality" is precisely the city that follows the dynamics of events, which can be physically changed but which can also be programmatically distributed over time. If the first case gives us the spatial dynamics, the second case opens the question of the city as fragments of time as different episodes of the city in which the essential questions of man's relationship with nature are not only in the spatial plane but also in the temporal sequence of mutual interaction. It remains to be seen whether and to what extent these findings will be the basis for a new view of the city.

Fig.10

Diagrams of different situations from the typical episodes: one day before March 13, 2020; a day after March 13, 2020 on working hours; a day after March 13 - weekend; day/night total lockdown April/May; April 2021 the restriction of catering facilities .

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