

UNTANGLING AMBIGUITIES: THE DEFINITION AND TYPOLOGY OF 'SPATIAL LEFTOVERS' IN SKOPJE'S URBAN FABRIC

Velkovska Martina

Faculty of Architecture, St. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, North Macedonia

martinavelkovska97@gmail.com

Abstract

The term "spatial leftovers" as a concept in urban studies has become known to describe areas within cities that are underutilized, residuary, or in other ways marginalized in the urban fabric. The concept despite its increasing use remains ambiguous, with inconsistent definitions and interpretations across disciplines. By critically engaging with the term "spatial leftovers," this paper addresses the gap examining its theoretical evolution, and refining its definition in the context of urban planning. The paper proposes a more precise understanding of spatial leftovers through this exploration of spaces resulting from historical, political, or socio-economic disruptions in urban planning processes. These leftovers in many cases are defined/ described by their exclusion from the active flow of the city, their lack of clear functional designation, and their potential to reflect broader urban inequalities and planning shortcomings.

The study examines the city of Skopje in North Macedonia which displays significant spatial leftovers because of its multifaceted historical path characterized by reconstruction periods, ideological changes, and swift urban growth. This study presents distinct examples of spatial leftovers located in Skopje's central urban area using case studies from multiple urban planning periods. The case studies consist of vacant spaces resulting from post-earthquake reconstruction and underused areas from the Socialist period alongside development voids from Skopje's post-2014 urban planning changes which included controversial architectural changes. The research applies mapping techniques to segment spatial leftovers into distinct categories which illustrate the diverse forces that have shaped urban development.

The methodology combines an extensive study of Skopje's urban history with spatial analysis of leftover urban spaces. This study creates a typology which maps leftover spaces by offering a spatial overview that connects physical traits with historical and socio-political factors behind their current conditions. The study identifies patterns of neglect and fragmentation as well as disconnection between spaces

while focusing on how urban planning decisions and policies contribute to these leftover areas.

Rather than being services of little practical use, the paper centrally argues that spatial leftovers represent sites of potential urban transformation, offering opportunities for regeneration and different forms of spatial organization. Mapping and analysing these spaces demonstrate how important such areas must be in urban planning initiatives going forward. A further component of this research provides a challenge to the conventional urban narratives that overlook marginalized spaces—they could play a serious role in building a more inclusive and sustainable urban future.

Keywords: spatial leftover, urban fabric, configuration, interaction, public space, transformation, "between" space, change, value

1.INTRODUCTION

The concept of spatial leftovers has gained increasing attention within urban studies, architecture, and planning as a way to describe spaces that remain underutilized, marginal, or disconnected from dominant urban processes. Often produced as unintended by-products of urban development, infrastructure expansion, or large-scale planning interventions, these spaces occupy ambiguous positions within the urban fabric. Despite their growing presence in academic discourse, spatial leftovers remain conceptually unstable and are frequently used interchangeably with related notions such as urban voids, residual spaces, liminal spaces, or in-between spaces, complicating both theoretical debate and planning practice.

Urban transformations driven by post-disaster reconstruction, ideological shifts, economic transitions, and rapid urban growth have intensified the production of spatial leftovers in many contemporary cities. Far from being accidental, these spaces reflect deeper structural conditions embedded in planning paradigms, governance models, and socio-political priorities, offering a critical lens through which urban fragmentation, inequality, and exclusion can be examined.

Against this background, this paper examines spatial leftovers as products of layered historical, political, and socio-economic processes, focusing on the central city area of Skopje (Small Ring) as a case study. Skopje's complex urban history—marked by post-earthquake reconstruction, socialist-era planning, infrastructure-led development, and recent large-scale urban interventions—has generated a diverse range of leftover spaces that remain insufficiently integrated into the everyday functioning of the city.

Research Goals

The primary goal of this research is to clarify and refine the concept of spatial leftovers within contemporary urban theory by addressing its definitional ambiguity and terminological overlap with related notions such as urban voids, in-between spaces, and residual spaces. By critically reviewing existing literature and theoretical frameworks, the study aims to establish a more precise and context-sensitive understanding of spatial leftovers as products of historical, political, and socio-economic urban processes.

A second goal is to identify, map, and classify spatial leftovers within the central city area of Skopje (Small Ring), using a typological approach that links spatial characteristics with specific periods of urban development, including post-earthquake reconstruction, socialist-era planning, infrastructure expansion, and post-2014 urban interventions.

Finally, the research seeks to demonstrate that spatial leftovers should not be understood solely as failures of urban planning, but as spaces with latent potential for urban regeneration, social inclusion, and alternative spatial practices. Through the case of Skopje, the study contributes to broader discussions on how marginalized urban spaces can inform more adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable planning strategies.

Literature Review

The examination of leftover spaces within urban areas has gained significant importance within urban studies, architecture, and planning. This chapter reviews of undertaken studies, fundamental theoretical views on leftover spaces, their historical trajectories, and contemporary discussions on leftover areas. It may further investigate different case studies in various parts of the world and point to the terminological ambiguity shaping the debate on urban leftover spaces.

Conceptualizing Urban Leftovers: A Historical Overview

Spatial leftovers have unfolded through different urban paradigms over time. Early studies about urban form, such as Kevin Lynch's *Good City Form* (1984), considered the spatial organization and unintended leftover spaces forged into the planned urban environments. Lefebvre's *Production of Space* (1974) argued space as a social construct, explaining how power equation structure urban landscapes, including fragmented and underused areas.

The concept of *terrain vague*, introduced by Ignasi de Solà-Morales (2002), is central to understanding urban leftovers as undefined, abandoned, or depleted. Whereas Madanipour (2003) elaborates on the conflicting relationship between public and private spaces by placing leftover space in interstitial zones outside of rustic bounds. Newer works such as *Loose Space* by Franck and Stevens (2006) give more attention to the potential of these spaces as places for informal or spontaneous urban activity.

Defining Spatial Leftovers: A Critical Review of Existing Literature

The conceptualization of spatial leftovers is enhanced by a great number of terminologies, such as urban voids (Ansari, 2016; Taranhum, 2018), liminal spaces (Zimmerman, 2008), and in-between spaces (Patterson, 2011). A number of definitions point to the emptiness of these spaces, others highlight social-political features.

Lopez-Piñeiro (2020) offers a structured glossary of what are called urban voids, divided according to morphology, usage, and temporal states. Aral (2009) discusses the potential of leftover spaces, arguing that the value of those spaces lies within their adaptability, not in their emptiness. Hoogkammer (2020) picks up from this by looking further into transition spaces in cities and explaining how these serve precisely as buffer zones between different urban functions. Even with these contributions, yet there is no accepted definition of spatial leftovers, creating theoretical vagueness and discord in the interpretation of this notion.

The Role of Marginalized Spaces in Urban Discourse

Marginalized urban spaces have long been sites of contestation, transformation, and innovation. The highlights of these areas of contestation, as argued by Paddison and Sharp (2007), include the reclaiming of public space through grassroots urban interventions. Disorder and informality bring vitality to the city, hence reinforcing the notion by Sennett that leftover spaces need not be failures but rather, opportunities for a rethinking-out of the whole question of city life.

Jonas and Rahmann's (2014) Tokyo Void illustrates how neglected and abandoned spaces in high-density urban environments could be redeveloped into creative and cultural interventions. Landman (2020) similarly calls for inclusivity in public space, asserting that these cheap leftover spaces could be test cases for adaptive urban strategies. This discourse aligns with more contemporary studies of sustainability, e.g., Covatta and Ikalović (2022), where an understanding is brought to light of the potentials that these leftover spaces hold in relation to urban resilience and play.

Global Case Studies: A Comparative Analysis of Leftover Spaces

Continuous global studies show how cities engage with leftover spaces. Seville: Through the Urban Void (Torres, 2016) looks into the transformation of neglected spaces into community-driven urban nodes, while Urban Pockets (URBEGO, 2015) elaborates on a way of reclaiming leftover spaces for public use in European cities. Case studies such as Tokyo Void (Jonas & Rahmann, 2014) provide perspective on high-density cities allowing for the repurposing of spatial leftovers. The Urban Rooms project of Sarajevo (UNDP) has provided an exciting perspective into temporary urbanism by demonstrating how participatory planning may amplify the potential of underutilized spaces. Additionally, Velevska (2014) analyses urban voids in transitional cities, elaborating on their changing role in post-socialist urban development.

Ambiguities and Discrepancies in the Existing Terminology

Despite much academic work on them, terminologies referring to spatial leftovers remain equivocal. They are often referred to by overlapping terminologies like urban voids, liminal spaces, in-between spaces, or residual spaces, which give rise to a certain conceptual ambiguity (Lopez-Piñeiro, 2020). Christiansen (2024) revises Foucault's heterotopias, at the same time asserting that each leftover space derives multiple meanings based on its specific socio-political context.

Additionally, perceptions of these spaces have differences in several disciplines. Some architects define them as design challenges, city planners highlight the regulatory gaps, and sociologists see them as arenas for social negotiation. The changing character of urban form complicates their development even more, demanding a more refined and interdisciplinary system of classification.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Epistemological and Ontological Considerations

This research integrates, into the study of Skopje's spatial leftovers, various epistemological and ontological frameworks. Epistemologically, a constructivist standpoint treats the different perceptions of, and meanings attributed to, urban leftovers, depending on context-societal, cultural, or historical. The study does not aspire toward an objective truth; it aims to gain insight into what the spatial leftovers have come to mean, along with the interpretations of those meanings through qualitative analysis. In its ontology, the research assumes that spatial leftovers are

dynamic and multi-layered, traditionally formed by historical, political, and socio-economic factors. These places cannot be considered static continuity, but they are continuously reconstructed throughout the life of the city. This reflects the constantly-changing relationship between the built environment and its inhabitants.

Methodological Approach: Mapping and Categorizing Spatial Leftovers

The methodological approach of this study employs both spatial mapping and classification in order to analyse spatial leftovers in the central city area of Skopje-Small Ring. With an initial mapping of these spaces to provide a clear insight into the geographical composition of these leftovers followed by the ideal typological classification of leftover spaces based on their points of origins, physical characteristics, and socio-political contexts {such as: post-earthquake reconstruction leftovers, socialist-era leftover spaces, Skopje 2014-induced leftovers, infrastructure-generated leftover spaces, etc.}. Such a dual approach is meant to provide an in-depth perspective of the component parts of the spatial leftovers and the attributes they consist of and the extent to which they contribute to the city.

Selection and Justification of Skopje (Central City Area- Scope Small Ring) as a Case Study

The central city area has been an unparalleled subject for study due to its unique nature of historical and urban development. Since then, the significance of the transformations it has undergone become clear: the elaboration on post-earthquake reconstruction, the socialist-oriented city-building agendas, and post-2014 controversies. Each worked to integrate the making of wastelands into the processes with specific local qualities. Such "scars" show various layers of Skopje's urban history from remanence to quick post-earthquake development, through the inheritance of socialist reasoning in authorities planning, and contemporary urban project traces. The diversity of architecture in Skopje combined with its everchanging socio-political background offered an ideal topical case for examining the emergence, characterization, and spatial processes of spatial leftovers.

Analytical Framework: Typological Classification of Spatial Leftovers

The analytical framework establishes typological classifications of spatial leftovers, subsequently providing grounds for the systematic recognition of various spaces in the Central City Area of Skopje. The definitions for all types vary between historical backgrounds, physical features, current utilization or neglect. Some include post-earthquake reconstruction leftovers, like underutilized areas near bridges; socialist-era leftover spaces, such as courtyards in housing blocks; and Skopje 2014 works that caused leftovers like isolated zones around newly erected monuments. The typology also involves natural and semi-natural leftover space, like green patches next to historical sites. The framework thereby provides a proper prism through which one could analyse and interpret the spatial leftovers while viewing them in relation to their history and the present state of the city.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research

This research understands that there are several limitations and delimitations, which can affect the range and findings of the study. The principal limitation is the focus on the central area of Skopje- Small Ring, which makes it challenging to apply this study's results to other urban regions or cities with different historical contexts and developmental paths. Moreover, this research, which appreciated very much the

meanings and experiences of spatial leftovers through qualitative methods, might not have generalizability. The mapping tools are limited in the fieldwork surveys according to availability of data and access to limited areas, mostly private ones. More so, the research delimits the analysis to the spaces that have been either physically or symbolically abandoned, leaving out the complex dynamics of active or transforming urban spaces, which arguably carry meanings of leftover in the wider sense.

3. THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF SKOPJE AND THE EMERGENCE OF SPATIAL LEFTOVERS

The Historical Trajectory of Urbanization in Skopje

The urbanization of Skopje has gone through several distinct phases in history, each of them contributing to the city's identity and spatial organization. Originally a small Ottoman settlement, it started to expand in the late 19th and early 20th centuries under the influence of European architectural styles and its position within the Ottoman Empire. The most dramatic changes in urban development happened right after the 1963 earthquake, which laid waste to much of the city. In response to this disaster, reconstruction on a grand scale began, defined by modernist principles in framework regarding functionality and efficiency. Although these efforts were indispensable in the city reconstruction, they also completed the creation of spatial leftovers- underdeveloped or marginal areas in the urban structure. These spatial leftovers usually left between new developments or along the important routes linger over Skopje as leftover spaces and still effectively structure its spatial environment. The post-earthquake period was the best ground for another layer of urban intercession, namely, the socialist planning and more recently, the project Skopje 2014, which has contributed in augmenting the leftover spatial features within the city. This history, while reflecting the ongoing conflict between urban development and the concomitant and thus unintentional creation of leftovers, represents simultaneously both the aspirations and the limits of the city's growth.

Socialist-Era Urban Planning and the Legacy of Spatial Leftovers

In Skopje during the years of socialism, urban planning was marked by grand, state-driven initiatives aimed at modernization and compliance with the values of socialism. The highlights of this planning included the building of monumental public structures, wide housing blocks, and broad boulevards meant to signify unity and progress and uphold the idea of collective welfare. Centralized planning mostly orientated itself toward grand infrastructure projects, thereby creating leftover areas- the spatial leftovers abandoned during the planning or left in a poor condition because of the ambitious plans for development. Examples are the expansive spaces between apartment buildings, parks that are empty most of the time, and discontinuity surrounding cultural institutions such as the Macedonian Opera and Ballet. These places, previously dedicated to common goal leisure purposes, are now often found in the assignment of private pieces among disconnected parts in the urban area. They represent the legacy of the rapid urbanization of that time, while dramatic physical changes took place, meant to integrate human life in the urban context. So, these leftovers are more than just physical gaps; they also carry with them social and cultural meanings- the memory of a time in city planning when big efficiency was favoured to the nuanced urban needs of the inhabitants.

The Post-Earthquake Reconstruction and its Spatial Consequences

The 1963 earthquake that devastated Skopje made its mark on the urban landscape. In fact, right after the disaster, rebuilding Skopje became a national priority, with different generations of architects and urban planners invited to undertake reconstruction efforts. While modernism offered the driving force behind making cities functional and efficient urban spaces, the reconstruction efforts often provided spatial leftovers and undeveloped peripheral areas left behind from the newly constructed buildings. However, such spaces along the Vardar River, around the central square, or large landmarks were fragmented or remain undeveloped, showing a disjointed process of rebuilding. Such leftover spaces were all made with rapid urban intervention and turned into physical gaps in the urban fabric of the city, representing both physical and symbolic voids. The juxtaposition between the urgency of reconstruction and the challenges of establishing urban cohesion is evident within them. Therefore, these spaces represent the leftovers of the physical effects from reconstruction after the earthquake: areas left incomplete or which never got fully integrated into the greater organization of the city.

The Skopje 2014 Project: Impacts on the City's Urban Fabric

Launched in 2010, the Skopje 2014 project sought to redefine the urban identity of the city through monumental structures, neoclassical buildings, and a plethora of symbolic statues. It had been framed as a way to reclaim Skopje's historical heritage and instil a sense of national pride. Although this project transformed the city visually, its execution brought more disjunction in terms of spatial leftovers. This abandoned area, located on the periphery of the new monumental landscape, allegedly the clearest sign of spatial disjunction, includes the statue of a Warrior on a Horse in Macedonia Square. More often than not, these monumental interventions interrupted the coherence of the city's streets, open spaces, and existing architectural body, creating vacant, peripheral lots that have little, if any, connection to the active urban core. Massive architecture was preferred in this project, and there were no ordinary human-scale decisions applied to the urban fabric; hence, the resulting zones carry a visual tension between the built environment and the everyday lives of the city's inhabitants. More than voids, these spatial leftovers mirror the broader urban political ambitions that shaped Skopje's development in the 21st century. They signified the rupture between the grandiose vision of urban renewal and the actualities of creating an integrated, functional, urban environment.

Infrastructure Development and the Creation of Marginalized Urban Areas

Skopje's progressive enhancement of the infrastructure - bridges, highways, and railway networks - must have launched a multifaceted impact on its spatial dynamics. While these infrastructures are an integral part of modernization and connectivity, they also contribute to establishing marginalized urban places. Intersectional infrastructure projects, notably the Goce Delcev Bridge and the extending railway lines close to the main train station, made fragments of leftover space that are segregated from the rest of the city. These regions are most frequently underused, disconnected, and extremely hard to access, thus contributing to the fragmentation of the strategical landscape. Spatial leftovers produced by infrastructure development are neither empty physical gaps in the cellular fabric, nor yet simply symbols of socio-economic marginalization. Those leftover zones got most often neglected or relegated to low-priority zones, thus aggravating the city's urban inequality and reducing the overall coherence of the city. The creation of

infrastructures is a necessary condition for the growth of the city, yet has, practically for other reasons, opened up the pockets of urban neglect, thus contributing further in the very complex map of spatial leftovers in-where Skopje's central area is concerned.

4. TYPOLOGY OF SPATIAL LEFTOVERS IN SKOPJE'S URBAN FABRIC

Socialist-Era Spatial Leftovers: Typologies and Analysis

While Socialist-led urban planning creates enormous, state-directed initiatives emphasizing modernization and industrialization in Skopje, this top-down, state-led planning evokes some history of monumental buildings and housing estates but also created many leftover spaces. Leftover spaces include the waste spaces of the underused courtyard of housing blocks, the fragmented green space, and the derelict zones surrounding central public institutions such as the Macedonian Opera and Ballet. These spatial leftovers were thus formed as the consequence of a planning process where function and uniformity overshadowed any integration of spaces at the human scale. A detailed look into these areas shows that although they were meant to perform certain functions in the urban fabric, they often lacked social and cultural activation to integrate them into the everyday life of the city. As a result, these spaces became isolated, neglected, and disconnected from the larger fabric of the city, revealing the unanticipated consequences of a planning style which failed to account for the nomadic needs of the city's residents.



Figure 1: a) Figure-ground of the Central City Area of the 1948 Regulatory Plan by Luděk Kubeš and the group of Czechoslovak urban planners; b) Overlay of the Regulatory Plan on today's Small Ring Scope

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the 1948 Regulatory Plan by Luděk Kubeš and the group of Czechoslovak urban planners

Post-Earthquake Reconstruction Leftovers: Characteristics

The Skopje earthquake of 1963 resulted in a big reconstruction program, which helped the city recover and, at the same time, gave rise and contributed to the formation of different spatial leftovers in the overall urban landscape. Most of these spatial leftovers were additionally created as a result of expeditiously rebuilding more for the infrastructures' restoration than the integrating of vacant or underutilized empty spaces into the urban fabric. Their prominent representation can be witnessed in the gaps and spaces emerging right near the Vardar River and the non-designed negative spaces surrounding the square in the very city center. Although strategically

located, these leftovers were, however, not fully completed by and incorporated into the urban framework, gaining immobility from active use. The case studies on these spatial leftovers emphasize how the post- earthquake reconstruction, done hastily, produced split spaces that are neglected or minimally developed, further compounding the spatial disconnection of the city. Hence, those spatial leftovers remain as reminders, physical and symbolic, of an urban history where the imperious need to reconstruct quickly ranked greater than urban coherence.



Figure 2: a) IX version of the 1965 plan for the reconstruction of the central city area; b) Overlay of the ninth version on today's Small Ring Scope; c) Conceptual overlay highlighting the spatial leftovers in the Small Ring, comparing 1963 plan (IX version) and today's urban leftovers

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the IX version of the 1965 Reconstruction Plan for the central city area of Skopje

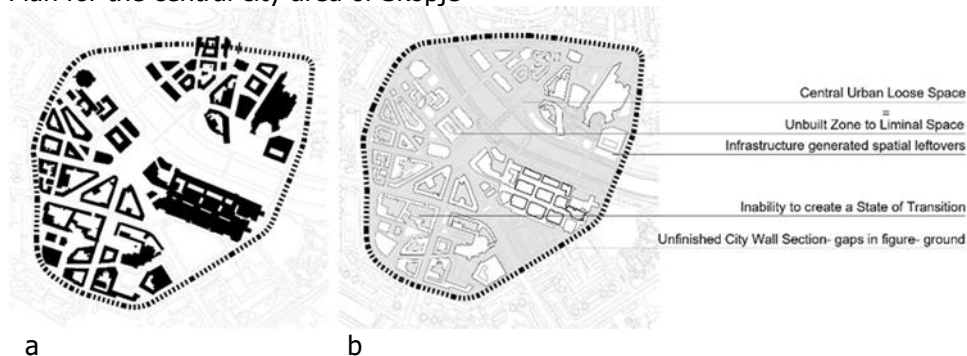


Figure 3: a) Figure-ground of the "Small Ring" central city area of the 1997 plan by Miroslav Grčev, Vlatko P. Korobar and Mirjana Penčić; b) Overlay of the 1997 plan with the today's Small Ring Scope highlighting spatial leftovers- comparing;

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the 1997 urban plan by Miroslav Grčev, Vlatko P. Korobar and Mirjana Penčić

Skopje 2014-Induced Spatial Leftovers: The Creation of New Spatial Gaps

The Skopje 2014 project was launched in the early 21st century, aimed at transforming the city and its identity through expensive neoclassical buildings and statues. While working to assert national identity and heritage, the project also helped create new spatial leftovers. Such new windswept spaces-lined areas for famous monuments like the Warrior on a Horse statue and other iconic sites around Macedonia Square-are now in need of a context. Quite the opposite: while some new constructions stand there, they have put additional wedges between existing

streets, open spaces, and footpaths, creating isolated and marginal areas instead. These spatial leftovers only accentuate the tension between ambitious architectural visions and urban integration. Their ambition and increased size create a space that is both functionally and socially removed from the very fabric of everyday city life. Such spatial leftovers really highlight the difficulties of operating between political and cultural aspirations and the real life of the city.

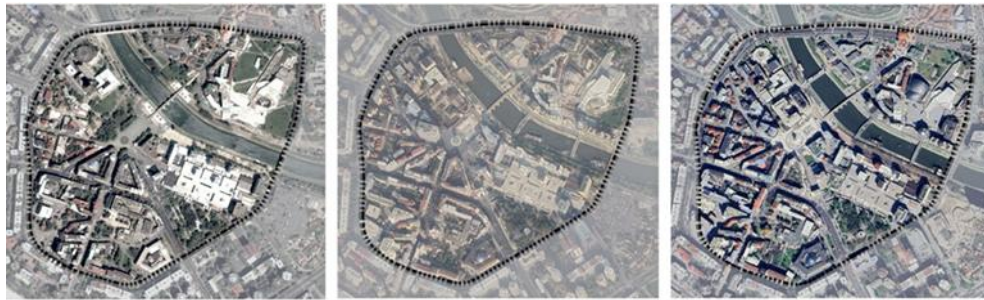
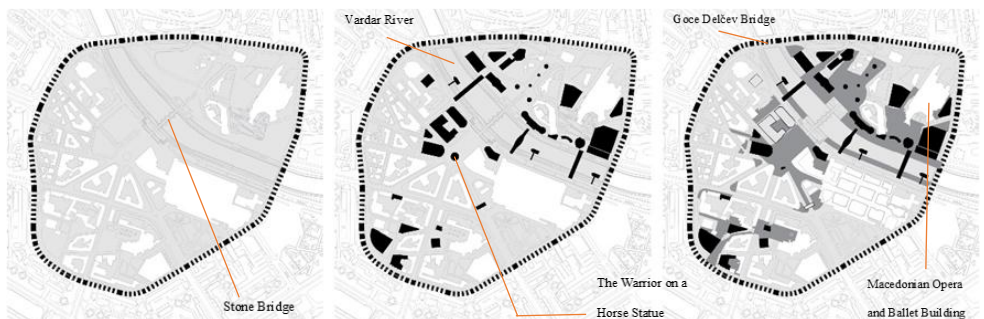


Figure 4: a) Google Earth photo of Small Ring before Skopje 2014; b) Google Earth photo of Small Ring during Skopje 2014 Project; c) Google Earth photo of Small Ring today

Source: Google Earth imagery (© Google, accessed [2025]), adapted by the author



- a
- b
- c
- 'free' space
- buildings
- buildings constructed/ in construction during Skopje 2014
- emergence of spatial leftovers

Figure 5: a) Site plan of Small Ring before Skopje 2014 project; b) Buildings constructed or in construction during Skopje 2014 project; c) areas for emergence of spatial leftovers- accentuate the tension between ambitious architectural visions and urban integration

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the Skopje 2014 urban interventions

Infrastructure-Generated Spatial Leftovers: Identifying Urban Infrastructural Failures

Urban infrastructure development in Skopje—like highways, bridges, and railways—has provoked large areas of spatial leftovers. These are often produced by infrastructure projects that were necessary for the advancement of a city but that ruined the wider urban environment and left behind voids or unresponsive areas. Such examples can be found in the vicinity of Goce Delčev Bridge and railway tracks next to the main train station. These areas are usually isolated, inaccessible, or not well-established as they are frequently marginalized from later urban planning processes. Spatial leftovers represent a decision not to deal with such a problem in the urban planning process, where integration is allowed to happen only in the long run while cities are being built. Each infrastructure development should have rather enhanced connectivity within the urban fabric. Instead, they fragmented the urban network choosing which areas were going to be spatially or socially connected to the neighborhoods. They are the somehow un-aimed consequences of a road mentality toward urban infrastructure that do not take into account holistic urban integration into account.

Commercial and Development Spatial Leftovers: Urban Vacancies and Their Implications

Commercial and development projects in Skopje have also given rise to significant spatial leftovers. These include vacant lots, unfinished construction sites, and underdeveloped areas that have resulted from stalled projects, economic uncertainty, or inefficient land-use planning. Urban vacancies in areas such as near the Old Bazaar exemplify these spatial leftovers. These gaps disrupt the cohesion of commercial districts and often serve as reminders of the inefficiencies in urban development. The implications of these spatial leftovers are far-reaching; they not only contribute to the physical fragmentation of the city but also exacerbate social inequalities by limiting access to services, opportunities, and economic activities. The presence of these vacant spaces signals a failure in urban planning to manage growth effectively, leading to persistent economic and social challenges in the affected areas.

Historic and Cultural Spatial Leftovers: Dis-junctures in the Urban Landscape

The historic and cultural heritage of Skopje forms a very important part of the city's identity, protested the city in the path of effective integration of heritage assets in the contemporary urban structure. Hence, a number of spatial leftovers in the form of cultural fragments were left: narrow alleys and underused elisions near the Stone Bridge. These spatial leftovers do not just communicate Skopje's past into the present space; they concurrently represent divergences between the preservation of tradition and the exigencies of modern urbanism. These settings abound with cultural and historical significance; however, still, they remain disunited from the pulsating urban ambience, therefore they get neglected and undeveloped. The integration of the cultural spaces, in their vast majority, into the surrounding urban tissue has been, anyhow, repeatedly a failed page in the book of Skopje. Therein through the juxtaposition and expressivity of both modernity against tradition creates dishevelled space. It captures the spirit of balancing between heritage retention and adherence to the demands of modern urban life, hence madness

serves as spaces that neither generate life nor act as functional components of the city.

Natural and Semi-Natural Spatial Leftovers: Green Spaces and Ecological Disconnections

The natural and semi-natural spatial leftovers in Skopje include green spaces, riverbanks, and various ecological zones which have been rendered marginal due to urban proliferation. Most of these spatial leftovers, valued for their ecological, recreational, or aesthetic purposes, are usually found on the outskirts of the city, in places where urban development reaches into the pockets of the land that would otherwise add to its ecological, recreational, or aesthetic value. Some of the notable examples include certain sections of the riverbanks along the river Vardar, isolated parks situated near the kale fortress, and the beautiful City Park. These areas could really make a contribution to the ecological health of the city and the quality of life for its citizens; however, due to urban neglect and competing land-use priorities, they remain underused or are not adequately managed. Their presence is an indication of the nature of urban planning failed in combining an idea of sustainable development within the overall growth and expansion of the city, with green spaces being an obvious priority. That undeveloped land thus appears to cause ecological disconnects and limited options for biodiversity, recreation, and environmental sustainability in the urban environment.

5. THE AMBIGUITY OF THE TERM 'SPATIAL LEFTOVERS'

Conceptual Ambiguities and the Fluidity of Urban Terminology

Since the term "spatial leftovers" lacks conceptual clarity in urban studies, its meaning and scope often become fluid and depend upon the specific context of its application. The inherent vagueness is owing to the multiplicity of ways in which leftover urban spaces appear, running from underused or neglected areas to spaces that have been reconfigured or repurposed over time. The conceptual fluidity has always pointed toward unresolved questions about defining what residuality really meant in urban spaces—what is a "leftover" in one area might not be that in another. A single, popularly accepted definition is elusive because the meanings of the word evolve with changes in urban development practices, theoretical paradigms, and local social and cultural dynamics. In this way, the term might include various kinds of urban phenomena—stretching from spatial gaps caused by rapid post-disaster reconstruction to spaces left behind by top-down planning systems—and point to the intricate and often contested realities of urban spaces existing outside the mainstream logic of development.

Time Frame	Term	Definition/Concept	Author(s)	Source	Case Studies/Examples in Skopje
1960s	Public Space	Open, accessible spaces that foster social interactions and urban diversity	Kevin Lynch, Henri Lefebvre	The Image of the City (1960), The Production of Space (1974)	Macedonia Square, City Park, Skanderbeg Square
1960s-1970s	Liminal Space	Transitional spaces that blur the boundary between two states or areas	Victor Turner	The Ritual Process (1969)	Pedestrian underpasses near the Old Railway Station and Bit Pazar
1980s-1990s	In-Between Space	Spaces between defined urban elements, acting as connectors	Herman Hertzberger	Lessons for Students in Architecture (1991)	Courtyards in socialist housing blocks near Bunjakovec Market and Debar Maalo
2000s	Loose Space	Spaces appropriated for unintended uses, waiting for creativity	Karen Franck & Quentin Stevens	Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life (2007)	Informal markets near the Green Market (Zelen Pazar), DIY parking lots around Kale Fortress
2000s	Urban Leftover Spaces	Unused, unplanned urban spaces that lack identity and transition	Various Urban Theorists	Multiple Sources	Spaces under Goce Delčev Bridge, Vardar riverbanks behind the Transport Center
2010s	Spatial Leftovers	Empty, impersonal, and "lonely" urban spaces disconnected from surroundings	Alanyali Aral	Redefining Leftover Space (2011)	Isolated plazas around Skopje 2014 monuments, empty pedestrian zones near the Archaeological Museum
2010s	Distemic Space	Impersonal spaces dominated by abstract relations rather than cultural significance	Wallin	Contemporary Urban Sociology	Open spaces around East Gate Mall, newly developed residential areas in Aerodrom
2010s	Marginalized Spaces	Spaces associated with deviance, deprivation, and exclusion	Burgers	Urban Typologies	Abandoned buildings near the Old Bazaar, informal housing near the railway station
2010s	Exposed Space	Spaces used for contemplation and idolization	Burgers	Urban Typologies	Spaces around the Warrior on a Horse statue, monument areas near the Macedonian Philharmonic
2010s	Everyday Places	Spaces used for routine daily interactions	Dines & Cattell	Public Space Research	Small urban squares in Debar Maalo, park benches along the Vardar River

Table 1: Time frame of different terms and their definition, consecutive examples in Skopje

Source: Author's elaboration based on literature review and case study analysis

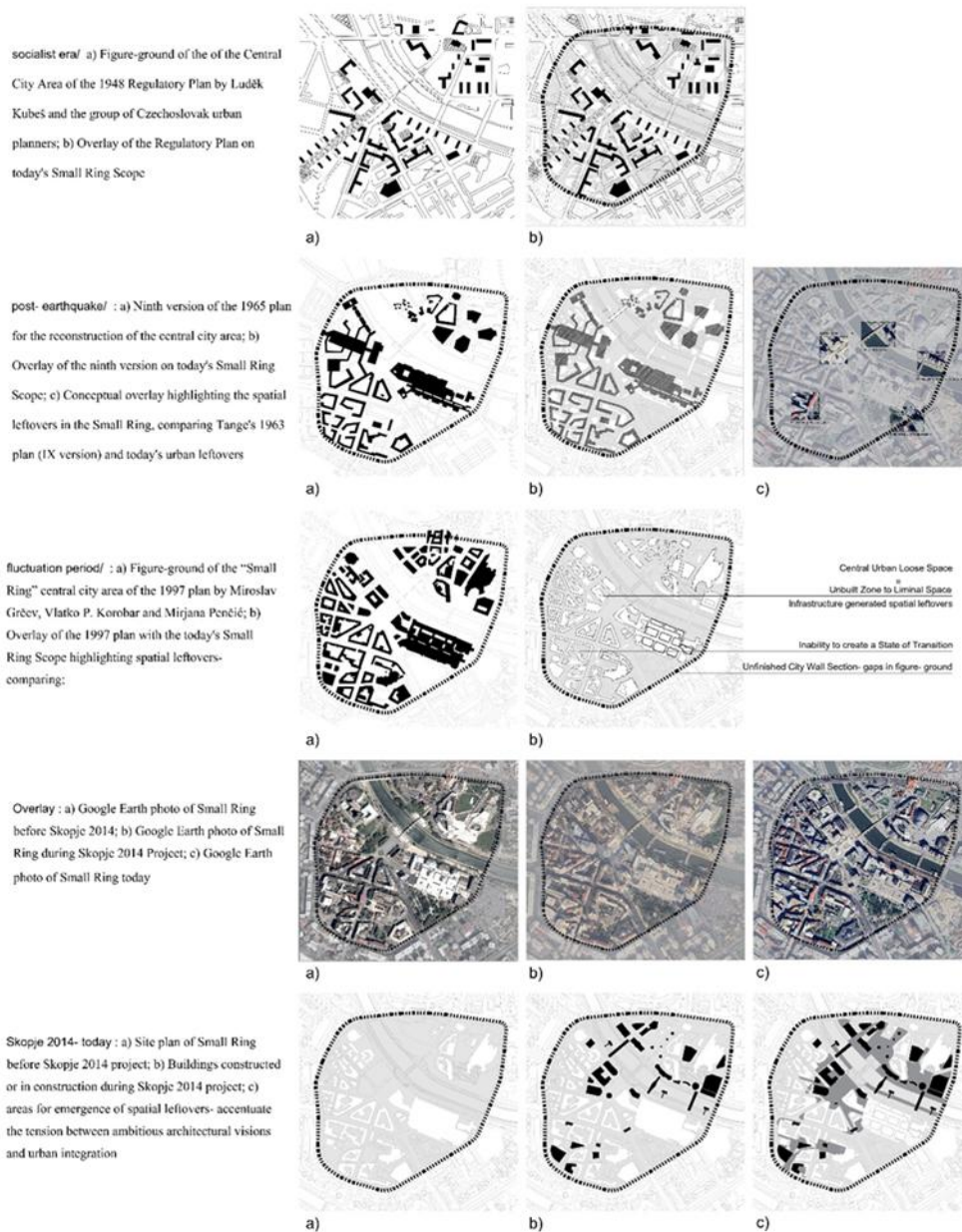


Figure 6: Time frame of different types of spatial leftovers, consecutive examples in Skopje

Source: Author's own elaboration based on field observations and case study analysis

The Sociopolitical and Economic Dimensions of Spatial Leftovers

Besides their physical nature, spatial leftovers exist under the burden of sociopolitical and economic determinants that structure a cityscape. Much too often, such locations are the product of structural inequality, urban policies, or economic conditions that predispose these neighbourhoods to disposition. The product of spatial leftovers casts an image of a further pattern of economic exclusion in the

city, whereby certain areas have little place in development, investment, or habitation conceptualization. In addition, such space may also become both the target and the site for social and political contestation, for within any section can be found marginalized groups, activists, or other progressive-elements seeking to use or appropriate that space for alternative purposes. Economically, that dimension of space left has come to represent the uneven distribution of resources; areas designated with low economic value are not developed but rather left unmitigated or mismanaged. Spatial leftovers are not simply physical remnants of Urban Planning errors; they embody one of the other messages embedded through the city's socio-economy. Therefore, this realization has challenged conventional urban planning paradigms of economic growth and development against social equity and inclusive spatial design.

Reinterpreting Leftovers: A Challenge to Traditional Urban Planning Paradigms

Where spatial leftovers challenge traditional urban planning paradigms, which often emphasize uniformity, functionality, and endless growth of urban space, spatial leftovers reveal the very contradictions and inefficiencies embedded in the processes of urban development. Left at the mercy of hasty planning, infrastructural neglect, or economic shortfall, these spaces resist conventionally defined goals of urban planning, which emphasize maximizing land value and optimization of space organization. Transforming these compromised spaces requires revisiting the very standards by which urban development is justified, ushering in the demands of an urban planning process that's quite more flexible and context-specific, incorporating the complexities and dynamism of varying urban environments. With continuous expansion and growth, cities present the challenge of harmonizing the regional spatial leftovers into a total urban fabric—a real challenge that designates for planners and policymakers a different perspective about the fitness with which to refurbish leftover spaces into vibrant and useful components of the city; spaces that are beyond just fulfilling urban residents' immediate basic needs, providing space for wider social and a meaningful reflection of values like sustainability, inclusivity, and cultural preservation.

The Role of Public Perception in Defining Spatial Leftovers

Public perception plays an important role in defining what a spatial leftover is and how such spaces are valued or rejected by urban residents. Most of the time, cultural, social, and political parameters are predominant forces in the perception of a space as belonging to this "leftover" category, where certain areas are perceived as abandoned, irrelevant, or unworthy of any express attention. The perception of a space as such does have great ramifications for how these spaces are managed, reclaimed, or transformed. For instance, the spaces that appear to be neglected or "unused" may be sites for potential revitalization or intervention; while others are considered worthless and written off completely—a realization that actually contributes to the additional marginalization of these areas. It is there that public engagement and participation in urban planning really become vital in reframing those spatial leftovers not as voids to be disregarded but rather spaces with unrealized potential for community-directed transformation. The collective perception of spatial leftovers influences the diversity of these spaces' integration into broader discussions such as urban regeneration, cultural heritage, or ecological

sustainability and lays the bedrock for reimagining these spaces relevant to contemporary social and political priorities.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR URBAN REGENERATION AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The Transformative Potential of Spatial Leftovers in Urban Planning

Spatial leftovers embody a grand opportunity for transformation in urban planning. These often-neglected or underbuilt spaces present an opportunity not only to reimagine them but also to legitimize them as active and functioning spaces within the urban environment. These neglected zones act as remnants or gaps in the urban context and can, when appropriately activated, become catalysts for wider urban regeneration. The introduction of spaces and parks like these may exemplify a different class of approach towards opening up new arenas for consideration of urban planning: towards a reconsideration of these sites and places as desk spaces, or opportunities, and not necessarily urban wastelands. When rethinking a space of possibility rather than merely urban waste, planners will develop a process to unlock their potential latent opportunity to fuel social, cultural, and economic life in cities. The narrative, more challenging yet embraced, reverts from the traditional rethink of urbanism, which dwelt on new construction and expansion, mostly neglecting the areas for reanimation. When strategically imagined, however, spatial leftovers may also serve to structure the process of conveying a more sustainable and resilient inclusive urban set aside areas that foster community engagement, provide greater urban biodiversity, and spur local economic development. The reclaiming and transforming of these spaces are testimony to a norm that is in transition towards the goals of contemporary sustainability, adaptive re-use, and circular urban planning provided.

The Role of Spatial Leftovers in Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Regeneration

Reclaiming and transforming follows that the conversion of spatial leftovers is key to developing a sustainable and inclusive urban space. Never mind their location, some of these are invariably on the margins or even totally neglected parts of the city, providing unique opportunities for introducing green infrastructure, affordable housing, and community-driven initiatives. Focus on urban development involving the adaptive reuse of spatial leftovers equally stands to benefit sustainability through minimization of new land development and negative environmental impact of urban sprawl. This also offers an important opportunity for converting these spaces for social inclusion by providing new platforms for community gatherings, recreation, and cultural activities. Further inclusion of spatial leftovers into overall urban regeneration strategies helps increase resilience with such spaces acting as buffers against environmental hazards of greater intensity.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has examined the concept of spatial leftovers through a critical theoretical review and a detailed case study of Skopje's central city area. By situating spatial leftovers within layered historical, political, and socio-economic processes, the research demonstrates that these spaces are not accidental anomalies but systematic outcomes of urban transformation shaped by planning paradigms, governance frameworks, and ideological agendas.

A central contribution of the study is the clarification of conceptual ambiguities surrounding spatial leftovers. By engaging with overlapping terminologies—such as urban voids, liminal spaces, and in-between spaces—the research positions spatial leftovers as a distinct analytical category defined by processes of exclusion, fragmentation, and incomplete urban integration. The proposed typological framework connects spatial characteristics with specific periods of urban development, offering a structured approach for identifying and interpreting leftover spaces within complex urban fabrics.

The case of Skopje illustrates how successive phases of urban development have generated diverse types of spatial leftovers. Post-earthquake reconstruction produced underdeveloped gaps within the urban core, socialist-era planning generated large-scale residual spaces lacking human-scale integration, while infrastructure-led and contemporary urban interventions further intensified spatial fragmentation. Together, these layers reveal how spatial leftovers function as material records of past planning decisions and shifting urban ideologies.

Rather than framing spatial leftovers solely as failures of urban planning, this research argues that they represent critical spatial resources with latent potential for urban regeneration, social inclusion, and alternative spatial practices. Their marginal position within the urban fabric allows for flexible, adaptive uses that challenge dominant models of growth-oriented urban development.

From a planning and policy perspective, the findings underscore the importance of systematically identifying and integrating spatial leftovers into urban development strategies. Treating these spaces as active components of the city—rather than as residual or disposable land—can contribute to more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban environments. In this sense, spatial leftovers should be understood not as voids to be erased, but as opportunities to rethink contemporary urban planning and to address long-standing spatial inequalities embedded in the urban fabric.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ansari, A. (2016). *Rethinking Urban Voids*.
- [2] Aral, E.A. (2009). *Redefining Leftover Space: Value and Potentiality for the City*.
- [3] Carmona, M. (2021). *Public Places, Urban Spaces*. Routledge.
- [4] Dahlberg, J. (2021). *Pretty Boring*.
- [5] Franck, K., & Stevens, Q. (2006). *Loose Space*. Routledge.
- [6] Hoogkammer, S. S. (2020). *Rethinking the Transition Space*. Delft University of Technology.
- [7] Ignasi De Sola-Morales. (2002). *Terrain Vague*.
- [8] Jonas, M., & Rahmann, H. (2014). *Tokyo Void: Possibilities in Absence*. Berlin: Jovis.
- [9] Landman, K. (2020). *Inclusive Public Space: Rethinking Practices of Mitigation, Adaptation, and Transformation*. Urban Design International.
- [10] Lefebvre, H. (1974). *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [11] López-Piñeiro, S. (2020). *A Glossary of Urban Voids*. Berlin: Jovis Verlag GmbH.
- [12] Lynch, K. (1984). *Good City Form*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [13] Madanipour, A. (2003). *Public and Private Spaces of the City*. London; New York: Routledge.
- [14] Dehaene, M., & De Cauter, L. (2008). *Heterotopia and the City*. Routledge.

- [15] Paddison, R., & Sharp, J. (2007). Questioning the end of public space: Reclaiming control of local banal spaces. *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 123(2), 87–106.
- [16] Patterson, M. (2011). In *Between Public and Private: Emerging Spaces in Cities*. University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.
- [17] Schoonderbeek, M., Pizzagalli, S., Privileggio, N., & Border Conditions. (2013). *Spaces, Poetics, and Voids*. Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura Press.
- [18] Sennett, R. (1971). *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- [19] Taranhum, N. (2018). *Rethinking Urban Voids*.
- [20] Torres, M. (2016). *Seville: Through the Urban Void*. Taylor & Francis.
- [21] URBEGO. (2015). *Urban Pockets: Reclaiming the Public in Left-Over Open Spaces*.
- [22] Zimmerman, P. T. (2008). *Liminal Space in Architecture: Threshold and Transition*. University of Tennessee.
- [23] Azhar, J., Gjerde, M., Vale, B., & Asif, M. (2022). Perception of urban leftover spaces: A comparative study of built environment and non-built environment participants. *Architecture*, 2(2), 231–244. <https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture2020013>
- [24] Landman, K. (2020). *Inclusive public space: Rethinking practices of mitigation, adaptation, and transformation*. Urban Design International.
- [25] Christiansen, N. (2024). Michel Foucault's 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias'. *Medium*. Available at: <https://medium.com/@noahjchristiansen/michel-foucaults-of-other-spaces-utopias-and-heterotopias-f34293b7a62e>
- [26] Covatta, A., & Ikalović, V. (2022). Urban resilience: A study of leftover spaces and play in dense city fabric. *Sustainability*, 14(20), 1–16. Available at: <https://ideas.repec.org/a/gam/jsusta/v14y2022i20p13514-d947191.html>
- [27] Issuu.com. (2015). *Urban Voids Unpacked [Master Thesis Report] - YOSI* by Simone Fracasso. Available at: https://issuu.com/simone_fracasso/docs/yosi-_urban_voids_unpacked__master
- [28] UNDP. (n.d.). *Urban Rooms of Sarajevo*. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/bosniaherzegovina/publications/urban-rooms-sarajevo>
- [29] Velevska, M.M. (2014). *Urban Voids: A Creative Strategy and Spatial Challenge for the Cities in Transition*. Academia.edu. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/81610701/Urban_Voids_A_Creative_Strategy_and_Spatial_Challenge_for_the_Cities_in_Transition?email_work_card=title

Article distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND).

Received: April 15, 2025,

Accepted: February 6, 2026