

FROM OBJECT TO FIELD

An extension of Skopje's bazaar

Reflection paper
Marianne Mentink 4215753
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Introduction

The city of Skopje is the capital of the newly named country North-Macedonia. This city is the background for a one-year investigation in my personal position in architecture practice.

Skopje lies in the north of North-Macedonia and is situated around the river Vardar. The city offers space to more than 500.000 inhabitants, which is a quarter of the complete population of the country.

Before the independence of Macedonia in 1991, the region was part of multiple Kingdoms and Empires, the Ottoman empire and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia being the last two. These political changes in the past 100 years together with a devastating earthquake in 1963 have shaped the built environment of Skopje.

Within the city center, there are four different organisational systems, which are clearly visible in the plan of the city. The four systems are the Ottoman bazaar, the European city plan, the Kenzo Tange modernism plan and the recent 2014 developments. These urban designs have shaped and changed the city center in the last century. The complex situation in Skopje was the inspiration for my project.

Research

The starting point of the project was based on order in the city. I investigated the spatial systems which were put in place by architects and urbanist. I started this research in Delft based on maps, research papers and historical information. For ten weeks I investigated the city without ever having been there. With inaccurate maps and not a lot of data these ten weeks were a bit too long. Once on site, exploring the city and gathering more information the research really took off.

After ten weeks we visited the city itself for two weeks, experiencing the city by workshops, on site investigations and trying to grasp the city. My goal for the onsite investigation was to see how the people of Skopje dealt with the built space and how they made it their own. The influence of the users (chaos) being the counterpart of the design of the architect (order).

Next to my own on site research we did group workshops and we explored Skopje through our senses. This method of looking at architecture through senses turned out not to be productive. In my case I looked at the city through taste. Resulting in an investigation of restaurants and places where food is sold. Leading me further away from my own research. This did taught me to look further than the direct meaning of a concept. Architecture can't be tasted by a person, and personal taste from residents wouldn't bring me anything relevant. But I can investigate spatial culture if I look at the spaces where food is sold, the environment around it and how the people use it.

After the field research it became clear that order and its counterpart chaos were to undefined to investigate the city. I discovered order and chaos can be found in the architectural space defined by the architect as well as the residents of Skopje. To make my terminology more clear I changed it to formal and informal. Understanding both formal and informal built environment are build up out of form, purpose, technique and communication. The difference is in the complex design of an architect (formal) and the simple execution of a resident of the city (informal).

Alongside the investigation of formal and informal, I did an investigation in one type of organisational system of space. I explored the history of Mat-buildings by Alison Smithsonⁱ and the theory of field conditions by Stan Allenⁱⁱ. I tried to understand the organisational system of space and program in these type of buildings and cities. Field conditions are characterized by being porous, build up by small aggregates, the full extend is highly fluid, repetition and seriality interconnect the object and the field, the configuration of objects define the in between space. At the beginning the most fascinating was how these buildings were not static. They were able to grow and expand and whilst following have an underlying system of rules, dimensions and shapes.

In addition to the research on the city of Skopje, I investigated the city archive of Skopje by Georgi Konstantinovski. I used my fascination for spatial order to look at the building. I compared the building to a machine, where all the different parts of form and function contribute to an optimal functioning building of an archive.

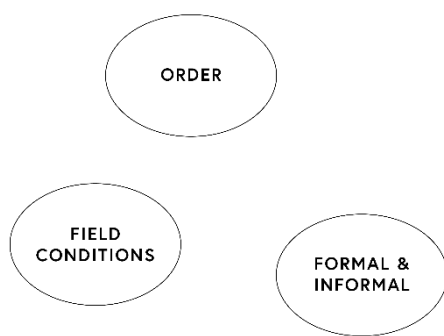


Figure 1 Research topics

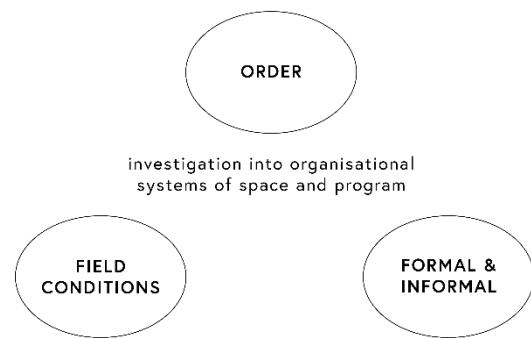


Figure 2 Relation research topics



Figure 3 Relation research topics

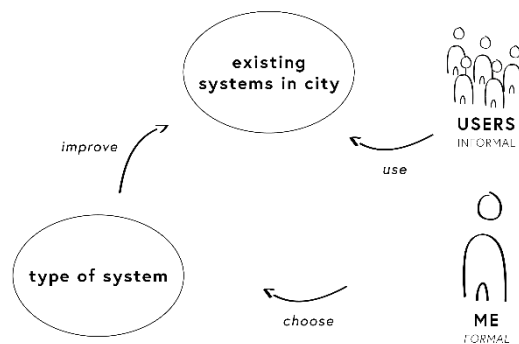


Figure 4 My position into practice

These investigations on the order, the formal and informal and the field felt somewhat unrelated. When I reflect on my research I see that all these investigations have an overarching theme. An investigation in organisational systems of space and program in the city.

Order and chaos where a first investigation in the organisation of space and program. How do the architects and urbanists have planned Skopje's buildings and public space? And how did Skopje's residents change the buildings and public spaces by living in them and using them?

The formal and informal research was a follow up of this investigation, but very focused on the space and program made by the residents of Skopje in between the existing buildings and public spaces of the city.

The field conditions are a type of organisational system of space and program. This relates to the way of organizing buildings and public space in a city, where buildings and public space are closely knit together and form a bigger network.

Integration of Research in Design

The research resulted in introducing field conditions as a type of organisation of space and program in a part of the existing urban fabric of the city center of Skopje which does not function as a field.

In my design I introduced a new type of organisation of space and program: the field. I will propose this new type of organisation, to translate it into a design that will allow for the people of Skopje to continue on making the city their own and allowing them to use the city to its full potential. Hereby connecting the formal, the field as another type of organisational system, and the informal, users being able to change their built environment, in my design.

The most important part in the design is the condition of small aggregates of a field. This part allows the field to grow and the users to adapt it. The small parts are designed by the architect, me. These are designed in a way that the users can easily handle them to build their own built environment. By creating the conditions of the field I don't design the final shape, I allow for the field to grow on its own. Usually this part is difficult for architects, because the overall form and extend are not set. The only tool is to show one possibility of what it could become out of many other possibilities. The conditions which allows for the field to happen should be made very clear. In my design the roof structure and the floor are the base of the field. These set the beginning of a new organisational system of space and program. Walls and closed roofs can be added by the users to create their (informal) spaces. This part was difficult to define. Where does my role as an architect begin? And where does the user of the space takes over? Which part is set and important for the overall field and which part can be added later?

During the development of the design I investigated reference projects. These projects are examples of organisational systems of space and program made by field conditions. To learn from these projects I dissected the objects and conditions in the projects to understand the full extent of the field. I investigate the Great Mosque of Cordoba, the bazaar of Tabriz in Iran and the Berlin Free University. I collected the conditions of the reference projects and turned them in my own conditions for my design. Beside that I also realized that the theory of field conditions is visible through our entire architecture history.

Project relevance in architecture

In the city center of Skopje the public sphere is very diverse. Some areas are much used and well connected while others are empty and unconnected. The public space in cities is getting more and more important, to offer places for interaction and integration of peopleⁱⁱⁱ.

The project is a different way of looking at public space and the buildings around it. By introducing field conditions in between existing buildings a new organisational system of space and program is added. Field conditions is a type of systems which allows more places for interaction and integration between people. Thus creating a better, more vibrant public sphere.



Figure 6 Bazaar Skopje - Nollli map of Bazaar - objects of field



Figure 5 Design site - Nollli map of site - objects in void

Some of the empty and unconnected public spaces defined in Skopje are made by organisational systems which define program and space as objects and voids. The objects being the buildings and the void being the public space. This way of looking at the urban plan all started in 1748 with the Nolli map. Giambattista Nolli, an Italian architect, made a map of the city of Rome where the buildings are black and the public space is white. With this map he divided the buildings and the public space in objects and voids. The Nolli map is one of the most often used tools of architects and urbanists . The map marks the boundary between the object and the void, the building and the public space, the field of architecture and the field of urbanism. This boundary prevents the building and the public space to interact.

When looking at the way the Dutch government divides urban space in the Netherlands the same design process is used. They make a clear distinction between the object and the void. For example in zoning plans of cities. These maps are made for the buildings, not the public space, making that space less important and unconnected to the buildings. Probably more European countries design cities like this.

My project proposes to change this mindset from object to void towards object to field. Integrating the public space in the design of the buildings by using field conditions. Creating an interconnected network which is the city. In addition to this network, the most important condition is porosity.

This mindset can be changed by altering our way of working. In the past the built environment was made by one person, the master builder. This person designed the buildings and the public space. One entity designing both building and public space is able to connect the two. Nowadays the built environment is split up in architecture and urbanism. You are either a specialized architect or urbanist. The architect designing the object and the urbanist deciding on the void.

Therefore, I propose to rejoin forces and to connect the architect and the urbanist into one office. In this way, they can meet, talk and learn from each other in order to design architecture and cities as part of an integrated city.

Personal process

My personal fascination in order has guided me through my entire graduation project. I very quickly defined this fascination, recognizing I enjoy order, logic and systems. Having a clear system in my work, enjoying an ordered work rhythm and loving the logic behind mathematics.

I am lucky I could define this fascination so quickly, because the route to translate this fascination in architecture has been long and sometimes unclear. The process of exploring order and chaos, to formal and informal and eventually ending up with field conditions.

From the beginning it was very clear I excel at dissecting and analysing projects in smaller pieces. I enjoyed trying to find the overall logic by breaking it up in pieces. But I was having trouble defining my own pieces and terms to combine them in a complete project. The problem I experienced was within the terminology I used. Sometimes it was very unclear which terms I used and which were still part of the project, but also not truly understanding the terms. The extend of the terminology of order in architecture was still vague, but at last I discovered what this meant for my own project and interests. I am not fascinated by order in architecture, but I am fascinated by the organisational systems of space and program. Although the terminology was sometimes unclear and shaky, the fascination turns out to be very strong. It has been an overarching theme through my entire process and I am still interested in exploring it even further.

During previous projects I recognized my interest in flexibility in the field of architecture and this relates to my current project as well. Flexibility comes back in the use of field conditions as an organisational system, where overall form and extend are not important but where users define the program and space.

ⁱ Smithson, A. (1974), How to Recognize and Read Mat-Building. Mainstream Architecture as it has Developed Towards the Mat-Building, *Architectural Design*, (9)

ⁱⁱ Allen, S. (1999), *Field Conditions*, in Points + Lines, New York, Princeton Architectural Press

ⁱⁱⁱ UNESCO, retrieved on 03-12-2019 from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/urban-development/migrants-inclusion-in-cities/good-practices/inclusion-through-access-to-public-space/>