

Spatial Leftovers and Their Role in the Everyday Use of Open Spaces: Types, Characteristics, and Meanings in the Case of Skopje's Central City Area

*By Martina Velkovska**

Spatial leftovers represent urban spaces that remain insufficiently integrated into the surrounding urban fabric due to discontinuities between planning intentions and their material realization. Although closely related to concepts such as terrain vague, lost spaces, urban voids, interstitial spaces, and loose spaces, the term remains conceptually fragmented, with different theoretical traditions emphasizing particular physical, functional, or socio-spatial characteristics. To address this conceptual ambiguity, this paper proposes an analytical framework that defines spatial leftovers through their morphology, historical origin, and contemporary patterns of use. The research focuses on the Small Ring within the central urban area of Skopje, where different periods of urban development have produced a wide range of residual spatial conditions. A qualitative case study approach combines historical analysis, morphological analysis, spatial mapping, field observation, and comparative analysis. Historical plans, contemporary spatial documentation, and on-site observations were systematically examined to identify representative examples and investigate their physical characteristics, functional conditions, and socio-spatial meanings. The analysis demonstrates that spatial leftovers do not constitute a homogeneous category but reflect distinct planning contexts and urban trajectories. Three principal typological categories are identified: post-war, post-earthquake, and post-transition spatial leftovers. These categories illustrate how different planning approaches generate fragmented spatial relationships, incomplete urban integration, and diverse patterns of everyday use. Rather than being isolated anomalies, spatial leftovers are interpreted as material evidence of the city's layered development and the long-term consequences of planning decisions. By integrating theoretical discussion with empirical analysis, the paper proposes a clearer conceptual definition and an empirically grounded typological framework for identifying and interpreting spatial leftovers. The study contributes to urban morphology and urban transformation research by providing a systematic approach for analysing residual urban conditions and their role within the contemporary city.

Introduction

Every process of urban transformation produces not only new urban structures but also spaces that remain outside the intended spatial order. These leftover spaces are neither entirely abandoned nor fully integrated into the urban fabric, yet they persist as tangible manifestations of historical planning decisions, infrastructural interventions, and changing socio-spatial conditions.

*PhD Student, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, North Macedonia.

These spaces have been described through a wide range of concepts, including terrain vague,¹ urban voids,² lost spaces,³ interstitial spaces,⁴ and loose spaces.⁵ While these concepts have significantly advanced the understanding of leftover urban conditions, they often emphasize particular aspects of the phenomenon, such as abandonment, indeterminacy, spatial emptiness, or informality. As a result, the diversity of spaces generated through different historical and planning processes remains insufficiently addressed, limiting comparative research and the development of a coherent analytical framework for their identification and interpretation.

Skopje provides a particularly suitable context for examining this phenomenon because its urban structure has been shaped by successive periods of transformation, each introducing new planning principles, spatial interventions, and patterns of urban development. The central urban area, particularly the Small Ring, is where these historical layers overlap most visibly, preserving traces of post-war reconstruction, the implementation of the 1963 post-earthquake reconstruction plan, and post-transition urban development. Rather than replacing one another, these planning phases have accumulated within the same urban fabric, producing discontinuities, fragmented spatial relations, and leftover spaces of diverse origins and characteristics.

The Small Ring is selected as the study area because it concentrates the city's principal public institutions, commercial functions, transport infrastructure, and representative public spaces, while also revealing a diverse range of leftover spaces. Their differences in morphology, accessibility, patterns of use, and relationship to the surrounding urban structure make this area suitable for examining how different historical and planning conditions contribute to the formation of leftover urban spaces.

Accordingly, this paper examines leftover spaces through historical cartography, spatial mapping, field observation, and comparative urban morphological analysis. It identifies representative typological categories and investigates their physical characteristics, modes of use, and urban meanings, demonstrating how these overlooked spaces reflect the historical processes through which the contemporary urban fabric has been shaped.

The study contributes by addressing the conceptual fragmentation surrounding leftover spaces through the development of a clearer definition and an empirically grounded typological framework. By relating their morphological characteristics, patterns of use, and spatial meanings to phases of urban transformation, it provides a systematic approach for identifying and interpreting leftover spaces as integral components of the urban fabric. The findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of leftover urban conditions and provide a basis for their consideration within future planning and urban design practice.

1. I. De Solà-Morales, "Terrain vague," in *Anyplace* (ed.) C. Davidson, 118-123 (Anyone Corporation, 1995).

2. A. Ansari, *Rethinking urban voids: Innovative ways to revitalize lost spaces* (CEPT University, 2016); E. A. Aral, "Redefining leftover space: Value and potentiality for the city," *ITU A|Z Journal of the Faculty of Architecture* 6, no. 2 (2009): 74-84.

3. R. Trancik, *Finding lost space: Theories of urban design* (John Wiley & Sons, 1986).

4. A. Madanipour, *Public and private spaces of the city* (Routledge, 2003).

5. K. A. Franck, and Q. Stevens (Eds.), *Loose space: Possibility and diversity in urban life* (Routledge, 2007).

Theoretical Framework: Conceptualizing Spatial Leftovers

The theoretical understanding of leftover urban conditions has developed through multiple disciplinary perspectives that examine spaces positioned outside established systems of spatial organization, use, and meaning. Rather than representing a single category of space, these conditions have been interpreted through different conceptual frameworks that emphasize their morphological, social, experiential, or symbolic characteristics. Concepts such as urban voids,⁶ lost spaces,⁷ terrain vague,⁸ interstitial spaces,⁹ and loose spaces¹⁰ have each contributed to expanding the understanding of urban areas that remain ambiguous, underdefined, or insufficiently integrated within their surroundings.

However, these concepts emerge from different theoretical traditions and address specific dimensions of leftover conditions. Some focus primarily on physical form, others on perception, everyday practices, or social appropriation. While this diversity has enriched the field, it has also resulted in conceptual fragmentation, making it difficult to establish a common analytical framework for examining spaces that emerge through different processes of urban change. Therefore, this research approaches spatial leftovers as a distinct analytical category that connects the physical characteristics of leftover spaces with the processes through which they are produced.

Theoretical Perspectives on Spatial Leftovers

The theoretical foundations for understanding spatial leftovers are rooted in broader debates on urban form, perception, and the relationship between planned structures and lived experience. Kevin Lynch's¹¹ work on urban imageability and legibility established the importance of recognizable spatial elements and coherent relationships within the urban environment. Although Lynch did not specifically address leftover spaces, his analysis provides an important perspective on areas that challenge conventional perceptions of urban order. Spaces that lack clear identity or integration can be understood as elements that interrupt the continuity and readability of the urban structure.

A different theoretical direction was developed by Henri Lefebvre,¹² whose concept of space as a social product transformed the understanding of urban space from a purely physical entity into a condition shaped by social relations, historical processes, and power structures. Lefebvre's conceptualization of space as socially produced challenges interpretations of leftover spaces as merely physical absences or failures, emphasizing instead their relationship with broader processes of spatial production.

6. Ansari, *Rethinking urban voids: Innovative ways to revitalize lost spaces*, 2016; Aral, "Redefining leftover space: Value and potentiality for the city," 2009, 74-84.

7. Trancik, *Finding lost space: Theories of urban design*, 1986.

8. De Solà-Morales, "Terrain vague," 1995.

9. Madanipour, *Public and private spaces of the city*, 2003.

10. Franck, and Stevens (Eds.), *Loose space: Possibility and diversity in urban life*, 2007.

11. K. Lynch, *Good city form* (MIT Press, 1984).

12. H. Lefebvre, *The production of space* (Blackwell, 1991) (Original work published 1974).

Emerging within the critique of modernist urban planning during the late twentieth century, Trancik's¹³ concept of lost spaces addressed the fragmentation produced by large-scale urban interventions and the weakening of traditional relationships between built form and public space. Trancik's contribution is significant because it shifted attention from isolated physical gaps toward the relationship between spatial configuration and urban coherence. Nevertheless, his approach primarily examines these spaces through the perspective of design integration and does not fully address their historical and socio-political formation.

Developed in the context of late twentieth-century European urban transformations, Ignasi de Solà-Morales¹⁴ introduced the concept of *terrain vague* and challenged functionalist interpretations of unused urban areas by emphasizing uncertainty, memory, and potential. These spaces represent conditions outside conventional urban functions and offer possibilities for alternative interpretations and future transformations. However, the concept of *terrain vague* primarily focuses on the perceptual and symbolic qualities of indeterminate spaces, while providing less attention to the processes of planning and transformation that generate them.

The notion of interstitial spaces, developed by Ali Madanipour,¹⁵ further contributed to understanding leftover conditions by focusing on spaces located between established categories. Within this perspective, spaces are not defined only by their physical characteristics but also by their position between social, functional, and spatial systems. Interstitial spaces reveal relationships between formal structures and informal practices, highlighting how ambiguous areas can become sites of negotiation, adaptation, and alternative forms of occupation.

Similarly, the concept of loose space, developed by Franck and Stevens,¹⁶ emphasizes the role of users in transforming ambiguous environments through temporary, informal, and unexpected practices. Loose spaces demonstrate that urban areas lacking predetermined functions may acquire significance through everyday activities and social appropriation. This perspective is particularly valuable because it challenges interpretations of leftover spaces as passive or dysfunctional and highlights their capacity to support diverse forms of urban life.

Together, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that leftover urban conditions cannot be understood through a single dimension. They may represent physical gaps within urban structures, spaces of uncertainty, locations of informal activity, or environments shaped by competing social meanings. Nevertheless, existing concepts tend to examine specific dimensions of residual urban conditions rather than providing an integrated framework that connects their physical characteristics, historical origins, and contemporary meanings. This limitation indicates the need for a concept capable of addressing leftover spaces not only as conditions of absence or ambiguity, but as products of specific historical, morphological, and socio-spatial processes. A comparative overview of the principal theoretical concepts discussed in this section is presented in Table 1.

13. Trancik, *Finding lost space: Theories of urban design*, 1986.

14. De Solà-Morales, "Terrain vague," 1995.

15. Madanipour, *Public and private spaces of the city*, 2003.

16. Franck and Stevens, *Loose space: Possibility and diversity in urban life*, 2007.

Table 1. *Theoretical Concepts Related to the Understanding of Spatial Leftovers*

Concept / theoretical contribution	Author(s)	Year	Main contribution to understanding spatial leftovers
Urban imageability and legibility	Lynch	1960	Explains how spaces lacking clear identity or integration affect the continuity and perception of urban structure
Production of space	Lefebvre	1974	Establishes space as a social product shaped by historical processes, power relations, and everyday practices
Lost spaces	Trancik	1986	Addresses fragmented urban areas and the loss of coherence between built form and public space
Terrain vague	de Solà-Morales	1995	Highlights uncertainty, memory, and symbolic potential of indeterminate urban spaces
Interstitial spaces	Madanipour	2004	Examines spaces between established spatial, functional, and social categories
Loose spaces	Franck & Stevens	2007	Explores informal appropriation and alternative uses of ambiguous urban environments

Note: Author's elaboration.

Defining Spatial Leftovers: Conceptual Position and Analytical Framework

Although existing concepts provide important perspectives on leftover urban conditions, they primarily address specific characteristics of these spaces. Urban voids emphasize physical absence, terrain vague focuses on ambiguity and symbolic potential, lost spaces address fragmentation of urban form, while interstitial spaces highlight transitional relationships between spatial categories. However, these approaches rarely integrate the historical processes, morphological characteristics, and contemporary patterns of use through which leftover spaces are produced.

In this research, spatial leftovers are understood as a distinct analytical category within residual urban conditions that combines morphological discontinuity, functional ambiguity, and socio-spatial complexity. The concept does not refer merely to vacant or undefined areas, but to spaces whose characteristics cannot be explained through physical form alone. Instead, spatial leftovers are examined through the relationship between their spatial configuration, patterns of use, and meanings within the broader urban structure. Therefore, the term spatial leftovers is used not as a synonym for urban voids, terrain vague, or interstitial spaces, but as an analytical framework that integrates the physical, functional, and socio-spatial dimensions through which residual urban conditions can be identified and interpreted.

Analytical Dimensions of Spatial Leftovers

The complexity of spatial leftovers requires an analytical approach that extends beyond their physical appearance and considers the multiple factors that influence their formation, use, and interpretation. In this article, spatial leftovers are examined through interconnected analytical dimensions that enable a comprehensive understanding of their morphological characteristics, functional conditions, social practices, and meanings within the urban structure.

The morphological dimension examines the physical characteristics and spatial configuration of leftover spaces, including their scale, boundaries, relationship with surrounding structures, accessibility, and degree of integration within the urban fabric. This dimension focuses on how spatial form influences the perception and functioning of leftover spaces, identifying whether they appear as isolated fragments, transitional areas, infrastructural remnants, or incomplete urban structures.

The functional dimension refers to the actual and potential uses associated with spatial leftovers. Rather than considering these spaces only through their intended function or lack of formal programming, this dimension examines patterns of occupation, temporary activities, informal uses, and possible adaptive capacities.¹⁷ It reveals the difference between planned functions and lived practices, highlighting how spaces without clearly defined purposes may acquire new roles through everyday use.

The socio-spatial dimension focuses on the relationship between people, practices, and spatial conditions. It examines processes of appropriation, adaptation, interaction, and negotiation that occur within leftover spaces. Through everyday practices, users may appropriate and reinterpret spaces beyond their formally prescribed functions.¹⁸ At the same time, the public character of such spaces is shaped by questions of accessibility, inclusion, and control, which influence who can use, appropriate, and participate in these environments.¹⁹ Through this dimension, such spaces are understood not as passive remnants of urban development, but as environments shaped by the activities and meanings produced by their users.

The historical dimension considers the relationship between spatial leftovers and the processes through which they emerged. It examines how different planning periods, urban interventions, and transformations contribute to the persistence of residual conditions within the contemporary city. This dimension is particularly relevant for the case of Skopje, where different phases of urban development have produced overlapping spatial structures and discontinuities.

The symbolic and perceptual dimension addresses the meanings, representations, and experiences associated with leftover spaces. Beyond their physical and functional characteristics, these spaces may carry collective memories, perceptions of neglect, uncertainty, identity, or potential.²⁰ This dimension considers how users and

17. M. Carmona, *Public places, urban spaces: The dimensions of urban design* (Routledge, 2021).

18. M. De Certeau, *The practice of everyday life* (University of California Press, 1984).

19. R. Paddison, and J. Sharp, "Questioning the end of public space: Reclaiming control of local banal spaces," *Scottish Geographical Journal* 123, no. 2 (2007): 87-106.

20. J. Azhar, M. Gjerde, B. Vale, and M. Asif, "Perception of urban leftover spaces: A comparative study of built environment and non-built environment participants," *Architecture* 2, no. 2 (2022): 231-244.

observers interpret these spaces and how such interpretations influence their position within the wider urban landscape.

Together, these dimensions establish an analytical framework for identifying and interpreting spatial leftovers as multidimensional urban conditions. They provide the basis for the subsequent empirical analysis by connecting spatial characteristics with historical origins, patterns of use, and socio-spatial meanings. Through this framework, spatial leftovers are examined not only as residual elements of the urban fabric, but as spaces that reveal the processes, contradictions, and transformations shaping the contemporary city. The analytical dimensions, together with their principal research questions and indicators, are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *Analytical Framework for the Identification and Interpretation of Spatial Leftovers*

Analytical dimension	Main questions	Indicators
Morphological	How is the space physically structured?	scale, boundaries, accessibility, relation to buildings
Functional	How is the space used?	formal/informal uses, activities, adaptability
Socio-spatial	How do users interact with it?	appropriation, social practices, conflicts
Historical	How was it produced?	planning period, transformation, previous structures
Symbolic/perceptual	How is it perceived?	identity, memory, neglect, potential

Note: Author's elaboration.

Methodological Approach

The study employs a qualitative research approach aimed at identifying, classifying, and interpreting spatial leftovers within the central urban area of Skopje. Given the multidimensional nature of these spaces, the research combines historical, morphological, and spatial analyses in order to examine not only their physical characteristics but also the processes through which they emerged and the ways in which they are experienced and used.

Rather than treating spatial leftovers as isolated spatial anomalies, the research examines them as spatial conditions embedded within broader urban transformations. The methodological framework therefore focuses on the relationship between urban form, historical development, patterns of use, and spatial meanings.

Research Approach and Case Study Selection

The research adopts a qualitative case study approach, focusing on the Small Ring within the central urban area of Skopje. The selection of Skopje as a case study is based on the specific characteristics of its urban development, which has been

shaped by several major phases of urban change and redevelopment. These processes have produced overlapping spatial structures, incomplete urban interventions, and residual conditions that remain visible within the contemporary city.

The Small Ring is selected as the primary study area because it represents one of the most significant urban zones in terms of concentration of public functions, institutional buildings, commercial activities, transport infrastructure, and representative public spaces. Its location within the central urban area of Skopje and its spatial extent are presented in Figure 1. At the same time, it contains a diverse range of spatial leftovers resulting from different planning decisions, infrastructural configurations, and transformations of the urban fabric.

The choice of the Small Ring also enables the investigation of spatial leftovers at an appropriate analytical scale. While individual spaces can be examined through their physical and functional characteristics, their meanings and origins can only be fully understood in relation to the wider urban structure in which they are embedded. Therefore, the study area provides a suitable framework for examining the relationship between large-scale urban processes and small-scale residual spatial conditions.



Figure 1. Location of the Small Ring within the Central City Area of Skopje

Note: Author's elaboration.

The selection of representative examples within the Small Ring is based on several criteria: (1) their relation to significant phases of urban transformation, (2) their morphological characteristics and position within the urban fabric, (3) the presence of undefined or transitional spatial conditions, and (4) their contemporary patterns of use and relationship with surrounding urban activities. These criteria enable the identification of spaces that represent different manifestations of spatial leftovers rather than focusing exclusively on abandoned or vacant areas.

Research Methods and Analytical Procedures

To investigate spatial leftovers within the Small Ring, the research combines several complementary methods that enable analysis across different spatial and temporal scales. The methodological framework integrates historical analysis, morphological analysis, spatial mapping, and field observation, allowing the analysis of their historical origins, characteristics, and conditions.

Historical analysis is applied to examine the relationship between spatial leftovers and the phases of urban development in Skopje. Historical urban plans, including the 1948 General Urban Plan, the 1965 Reconstruction Plan following the 1963 earthquake, and later planning documents, are analyzed in order to identify changes in urban structure, incomplete planning intentions, and spatial conditions that persisted through different periods. This analysis provides the basis for understanding spatial leftovers as outcomes of specific historical processes rather than isolated physical conditions.

Morphological analysis is used to examine the physical characteristics and spatial relationships of identified leftover spaces within the Small Ring. The analysis focuses on their position within the urban fabric, relationship with surrounding buildings and infrastructure, degree of enclosure, accessibility, boundaries, and connection to adjacent public spaces. Through this approach, different morphological conditions are identified, including fragmented areas, infrastructural residual conditions, transitional zones, and incomplete spatial configurations.

Spatial mapping is employed as a tool for locating, categorizing, and comparing spatial leftovers within the study area. Mapping is conducted through the analysis of spatial relationships, movement patterns, accessibility, and the position of leftover spaces in relation to major urban elements. The resulting spatial framework enables the comparison of different examples and supports the development of a typological classification based on shared characteristics rather than individual cases.

Field observation and photographic documentation are used to examine the contemporary condition and everyday use of selected spatial leftovers. Site visits focus on patterns of occupation, informal activities, maintenance conditions, accessibility, and relationships between users and surrounding urban structures. These observations provide empirical evidence regarding how leftover spaces function beyond their original planning intentions and how their meanings are produced through everyday practices.

To systematize the documentation and facilitate the comparison of individual cases, a Spatial Leftover Identification Sheet (Figure 2) is developed as an analytical tool. The sheet integrates basic spatial information, historical background,

morphological characteristics, and current patterns of use, photographic documentation, and interpretative analysis. This framework enables the consistent documentation of selected examples and provides the empirical basis for the subsequent typological classification.

Spatial Leftover Identification Sheet		Category	Description
Basic Information			
Site Name:		Current Uses	
		Meaning	
Location:		Meaning	
Historical Typology:		Meaning	
Period of Emergence:		Meaning	
* Position within the Small Ring Area		* Photographic Documentation Visual record of the site's physical condition, morphology, and current use.	
		* Interpretative Collage/ reading	

Figure 2. *Spatial Leftover Identification Sheet Developed for the Systematic Documentation and Analysis of Individual Spatial Leftovers*

Note: Author's elaboration.

The collected information from these methods is subsequently synthesized through comparative analysis. The comparison of historical origins, morphological characteristics, and contemporary patterns of use enables the identification of recurring conditions and the formulation of typological categories of spatial leftovers. This synthesis allows the research to move beyond individual examples and establish a typological understanding of spatial leftovers based on their historical formation, morphological characteristics, and contemporary conditions.

Typological Classification Procedure

The typological classification is developed through a comparative analysis of the identified spatial leftovers within the Small Ring. The classification process is based on the analysis of recurring characteristics among different cases, considering both the conditions through which these spaces emerge and their present spatial configurations.

Four analytical criteria are established for the classification: (1) historical origin, (2) morphological characteristics, (3) functional condition, and (4) patterns of use. These criteria enable the systematic comparison of individual examples and

support the identification of similarities and differences among spatial leftovers within the study area.

The first criterion, historical origin, examines the relationship between leftover spaces and the urban processes that generate them. This includes spaces resulting from different phases of urban development, such as post-war planning, post-earthquake reconstruction, infrastructural interventions, and later modifications of the urban structure.

The second criterion, morphological characteristics, refers to the physical configuration of leftover spaces and their relationship with surrounding urban elements. The analysis considers their position within the urban fabric, connection to adjacent structures, degree of enclosure, accessibility, spatial boundaries, and relationship with public spaces.

The third criterion, functional condition, examines the relationship between the originally intended role of a space and its contemporary condition. This criterion identifies whether spaces remain underused, accommodate informal activities, or have developed alternative forms of use beyond their initial planning purpose.

The fourth criterion, patterns of use, focuses on the contemporary ways in which these spaces are occupied and experienced. It considers observed activities, accessibility, intensity of use, and the relationship between users and the surrounding urban environment.

Based on the combination of these criteria, representative examples are grouped according to shared characteristics, resulting in the formulation of a typological framework for spatial leftovers within the Small Ring. The classification provides an analytical structure for comparing different cases and identifying how distinct urban processes have produced specific residual spatial conditions.

Typological Classification of Spatial Leftovers in Skopje's Small Ring

The analysis of spatial leftovers within the Small Ring reveals that these spaces are not generated through a single urban process, but emerge as consequences of different historical phases, planning approaches, and transformations of the urban structure. Their physical characteristics, spatial position, and contemporary conditions are closely related to the planning intentions and urban interventions through which they were produced.

Based on the historical analysis, morphological examination, spatial mapping, and field observations, three main typological categories of spatial leftovers are identified: **post-war spatial leftovers**, **post-earthquake spatial leftovers**, and **post-transition spatial leftovers**. Each category represents a specific relationship between planning intentions and their material realization, demonstrating how different periods of urban development produce distinct residual conditions within the contemporary urban fabric.

Rather than representing isolated spatial deficiencies, these categories illustrate the cumulative nature of urban transformation in Skopje, where successive interventions have left behind spaces with different degrees of integration, accessibility, use, and meaning.

Post-war Spatial Leftovers: Residual Conditions of Early Urban Transformation

The first category refers to spatial leftovers generated during the post-war period, when Skopje underwent significant urban restructuring influenced by new planning principles and the need for modernization of the urban system. The 1948 General Urban Plan introduced a new functional organization of the city, establishing clearer zoning principles, new traffic systems, and a redefinition of central urban areas.

Although the plan aimed to create a more coherent and rational urban structure, its implementation resulted in spatial discontinuities between existing urban patterns and newly introduced planning concepts. The transformation of the existing fabric produced spaces that remained insufficiently integrated into the emerging urban structure, creating residual areas between planned elements.

Post-war spatial leftovers are therefore characterized primarily by **fragmentation and incomplete spatial integration**. Unlike abandoned spaces, these areas often remain physically connected to the surrounding city but lack a clearly defined role within the planned urban system. Their formation reflects the tension between inherited urban structures and new planning intentions.

Within the Small Ring, these conditions are visible in fragmented urban areas where previous spatial relationships were interrupted by new functional organizations, altered circulation patterns, or changes in the relationship between built structures and open spaces.

The main characteristics of this typology include:

- discontinuity between previous and planned urban structures;
- fragmented spatial configurations;
- unclear relationship between built and open space;
- reduced integration into the surrounding urban system.

These spaces represent the earliest layer of spatial leftovers identified in the study and demonstrate how urban transformation processes can generate residual conditions even within planned development.

Post-earthquake Spatial Leftovers: Residual Spaces of Reconstruction and Modernist Transformation

The second and most extensive category consists of spatial leftovers generated after the 1963 earthquake and the subsequent reconstruction of Skopje. The Reconstruction Plan of 1965 introduced a radical transformation of the city's spatial structure, replacing previous urban patterns with a modernist planning concept based on new circulation systems, large-scale urban structures, and reorganized public spaces.

While the reconstruction process established a new urban identity and introduced significant architectural and infrastructural interventions, the scale and complexity of these transformations also produced spaces that remained between planned intentions and realized urban conditions.

Post-earthquake spatial leftovers are primarily associated with **discontinuities produced by large-scale interventions**. These include spaces created beneath or alongside infrastructure, transitional areas between major urban structures, incomplete spatial connections, and zones where different planning systems meet without full integration.

Within the Small Ring, this typology represents the strongest relationship between historical planning decisions and contemporary residual conditions.

These spaces are characterized by:

- strong influence of infrastructural systems;
- fragmented connections between urban elements;
- ambiguous accessibility and use;
- coexistence of planned functions and informal appropriation;
- visible traces of unfinished or transformed planning intentions.

The analysis demonstrates that many spatial leftovers in central Skopje are not accidental by-products but direct consequences of the reconstruction strategy itself. Their present condition reflects the difference between the conceptual ambitions of the reconstruction plan and the complexity of long-term urban development.

Post-transition Spatial Leftovers: Spaces of Urban Reconfiguration and Conflicting Transformations

The third category includes spatial leftovers produced during the post-transition period, when changes in ownership structures, planning regulations, economic conditions, and new urban interventions significantly influenced the transformation of central Skopje.

Unlike earlier categories, which are primarily generated through large-scale planning interventions, post-transition spatial leftovers emerge through the interaction between existing urban structures and new forms of development. These processes often introduce new functions, alter public-private relationships, and modify previously established spatial configurations.

Within the Small Ring, these spaces are associated with areas where contemporary interventions interact with inherited urban structures, creating conflicts between previous planning concepts and new urban demands. The transformation of public spaces, commercial pressures, and symbolic interventions within the central area contribute to the creation of spaces with uncertain identity and changing patterns of use.

Post-transition spatial leftovers are characterized by:

- conflicting spatial narratives;
- instability of function and ownership;
- transformation of previously established public relationships;
- temporary or adaptive patterns of use;
- tension between inherited structures and new interventions.

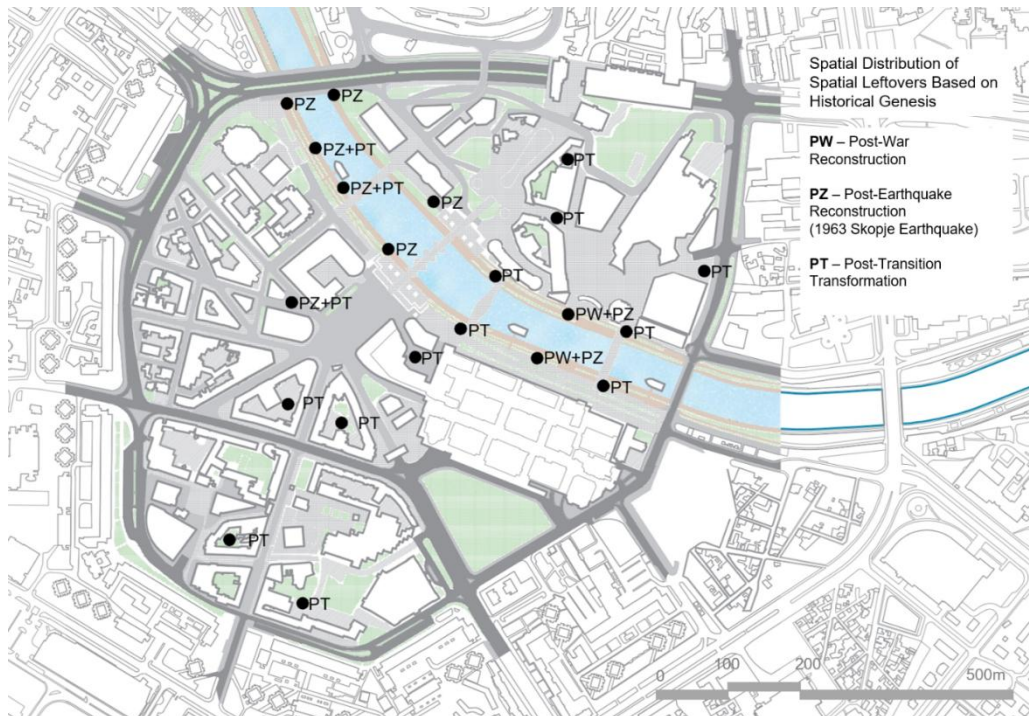


Figure 3. *Spatial Distribution of Spatial Leftovers According to Their Historical Genesis within the Small Ring*

Note: Author's elaboration.

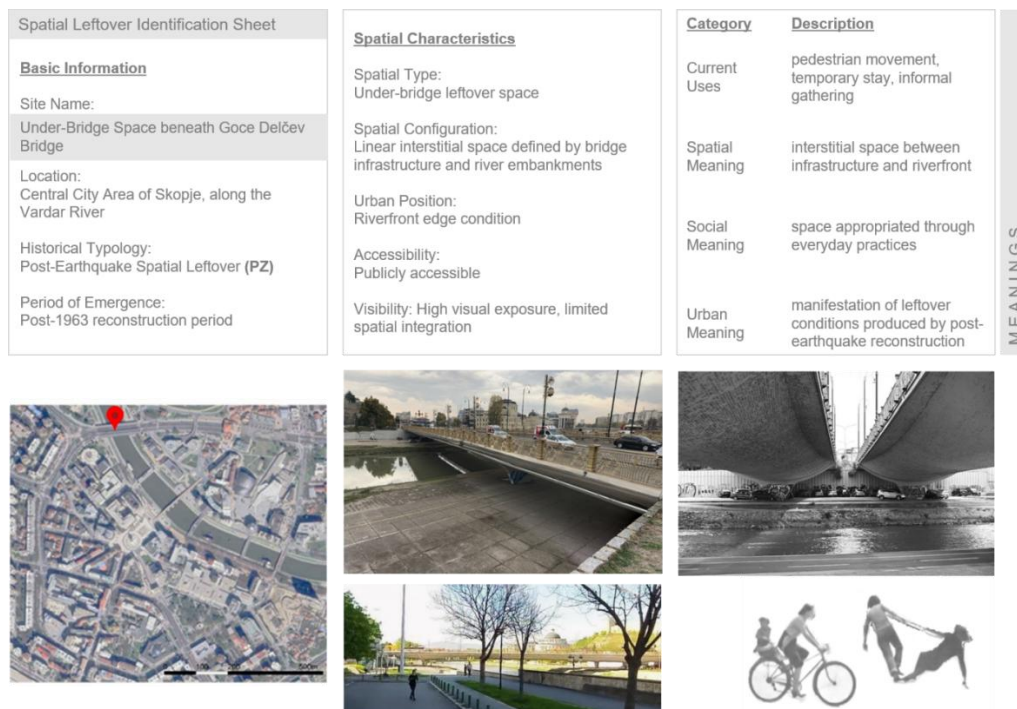


Figure 4. *Spatial Leftover Identification Sheet: Under-Bridge Space beneath Goce Delčev Bridge (Post-Earthquake Spatial Leftover).*

Note: Based on Google Maps; photographs and analytical elaboration by the author.

These spaces demonstrate that spatial leftovers are continuously produced, not only through physical destruction or incomplete planning, but also through changes in social, economic, and institutional conditions.

The spatial distribution of the identified spatial leftovers according to their historical genesis is presented in Figure 3, showing their classification into three typological categories: post-war, post-earthquake, and post-transition spatial leftovers.

One example of a post-earthquake spatial leftover identified within the Small Ring is the under-bridge space beneath Goce Delčev Bridge (Figure 4). This space represents a residual condition generated through infrastructural interventions introduced during Skopje's post-earthquake reconstruction period. Its current condition is defined by limited integration with surrounding pedestrian spaces, unclear functional identity, and a strong dependence on its infrastructural context. Although centrally located, the space remains primarily transitional and accommodates limited forms of everyday use. This example demonstrates how large-scale urban interventions can produce residual conditions where planned infrastructure and lived urban experience do not fully overlap.

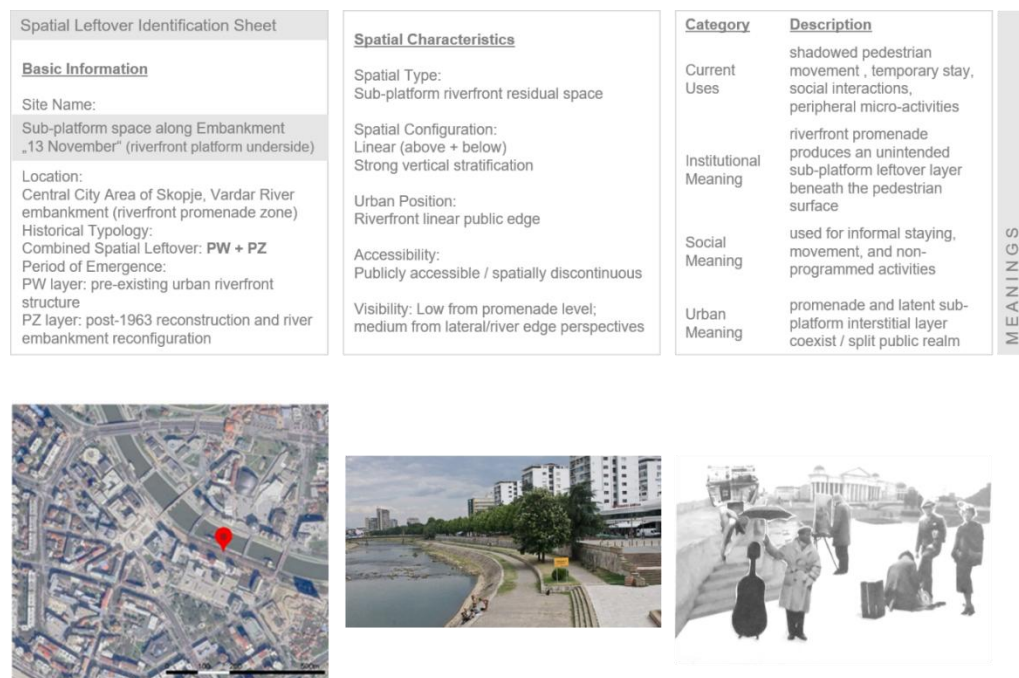


Figure 5. *Spatial Leftover Identification Sheet: Sub-Platform Space Along Embankment “13 November”-Riverfront Platform Underside (Post-war + Post-Earthquake Spatial Leftover)*

Note: Based on Google Maps; photographs and analytical elaboration by the author.

One example of a layered spatial leftover identified within the Small Ring is the sub-platform space along the “13 November” Embankment beneath the riverfront platform (Figure 5). This space represents a layered spatial condition shaped by different phases of riverfront restructuring in central Skopje. Its formation is associated with the reconfiguration of the river edge during the post-war period and the large-scale urban interventions introduced after the 1963 earthquake. Located beneath the

dominant riverfront platform, the space remains physically connected to the central urban area while maintaining a secondary and partially detached position within the public realm. Limited visibility, restricted accessibility, and an undefined functional role contribute to its residual character. This example illustrates how changes in the organization of urban infrastructure and public space can produce intermediate conditions that remain between formal planning intentions and everyday urban use.

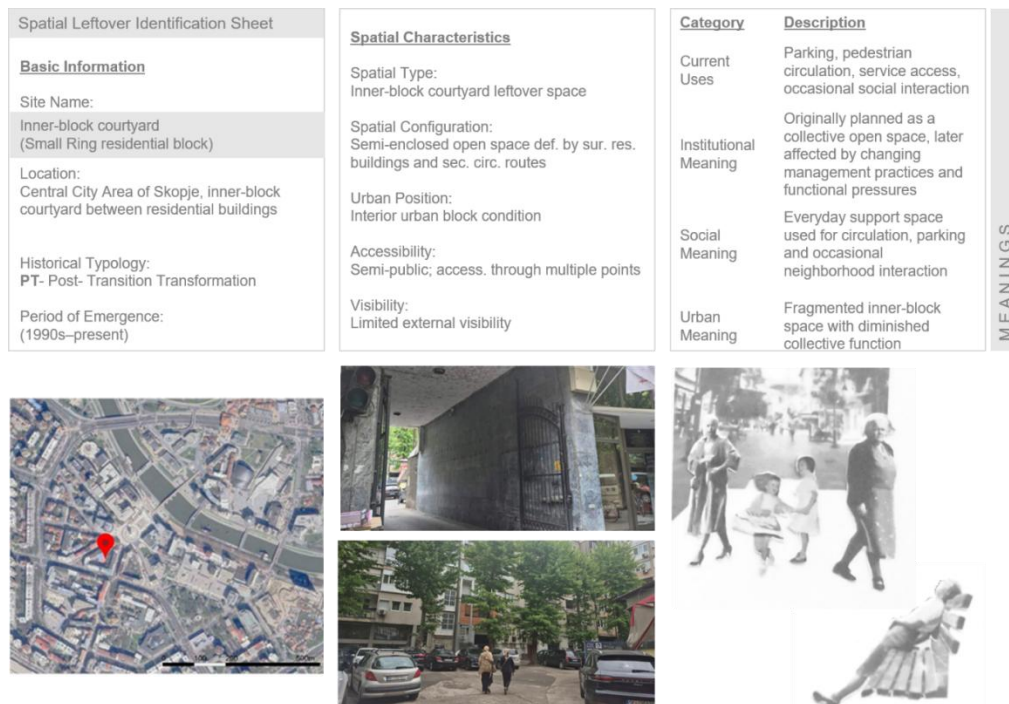


Figure 6. *Spatial Leftover Identification Sheet: Inner-block Courtyard- Small Ring Residential Block (Post-Transition Spatial Leftover)*

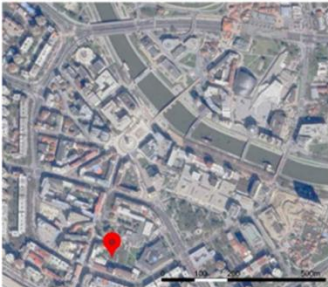
Note: Based on Google Maps; photographs and analytical elaboration by the author.

The inner-block courtyard within the Small Ring residential area (Figure 6) represents a post-transition spatial leftover generated through changes in urban development patterns, property relations, and the transformation of previously established residential structures. Although positioned within a consolidated urban block, the space has lost a clearly defined collective role due to fragmented ownership, limited accessibility, and changing relationships between private and shared space. Its residual condition is not primarily related to physical abandonment, but rather to the gradual weakening of its original spatial function and social significance. This example demonstrates how changes in planning conditions and urban management can produce ambiguous internal spaces that remain embedded within the city while lacking a clearly defined role.

Spatial Leftover Identification Sheet	
Basic Information	
Site Name:	
Interstitial leftover space (circulation edge condition)	
Location:	
Inner urban block condition in the southern central core	
Historical Typology:	
PT- Post- Transition Transformation	
Period of Emergence:	
Gradual emergence / urban transformation and spatial adaptation processes	

Spatial Characteristics	
Spatial Type:	Interstitial leftover space
Spatial Configuration:	Formed by the intersection of pedestrian lines and infra/structural edges (irreg. shape)
Urban Position:	Interior interstitial condition
Accessibility:	Publicly accessible but weakly integrated
Visibility:	Low visual prominence

Category	Description
Current Uses	Occasional passage, temporary occupation, informal micro-uses
Spatial Meaning	irregular-shaped interstitial space formed between circulation lines and infrastructural edges
Social Meaning	marginal space used opportunistically for incidental passage and temporary informal activities
Urban Meaning	produced by fragmentation of pedestrian and infrastructural continuity



MEANINGS

Figure 7. *Spatial Leftover Identification Sheet: Interstitial Leftover Space- Circulation Edge Condition (Post-Transition Spatial Leftover)*

Note: Based on Google Maps; photographs and analytical elaboration by the author.

The interstitial circulation edge condition within the Small Ring (Figure 7) represents a post-transition spatial leftover formed through changes in movement patterns, spatial organization, and the relationship between different urban functions. Located between established circulation routes and adjacent urban elements, the space remains physically present but lacks a clearly defined role within the contemporary public realm. Its residual character results from weak spatial integration, fragmented boundaries, and the absence of a consistent relationship between pedestrian movement and surrounding activities. Although primarily experienced as a passage or transitional zone, the space has the potential to support alternative forms of use through adaptation and improved integration. This example demonstrates how contemporary urban reorganization can generate intermediate conditions where existing spatial structures and new patterns of use do not fully correspond.

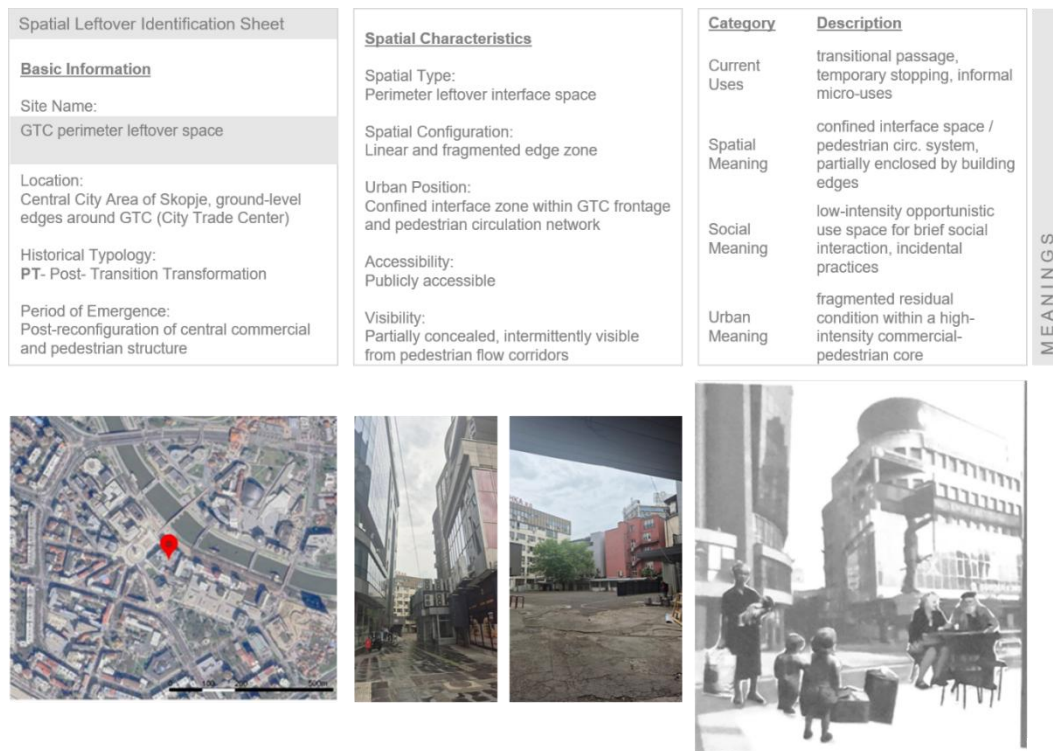


Figure 8. *Spatial Leftover Identification Sheet: GTC perimeter leftover space (Post-transition Spatial Leftover)*

Note: Based on Google Maps; photographs and analytical elaboration by the author.

The perimeter space around GTC (Figure 8) represents post-transition spatial leftover formed through changes in the relationship between a major public building, its surrounding open spaces, and contemporary patterns of use. Originally conceived as part of an integrated public environment, these edge conditions have gradually acquired a more fragmented character due to altered circulation patterns, commercial pressures, and changing forms of spatial management. Although located within one of the most active areas of the Small Ring, certain perimeter zones remain partially detached from everyday urban flows and lack a clearly defined role. This example demonstrates how changes in the use, regulation, and perception of established urban structures can generate residual conditions even within highly central and publicly significant locations.

Comparative Analysis of Typological Categories

The identified typologies demonstrate that spatial leftovers within the Small Ring are produced through different historical mechanisms rather than representing a homogeneous spatial phenomenon. Although these spaces share certain characteristics, such as incomplete integration, fragmented relationships with their surroundings, and ambiguous patterns of use, their formation processes and contemporary conditions differ according to the urban transformations that generate them.

Post-war spatial leftovers reflect the tensions between inherited urban structures and newly introduced planning principles, where changes in urban organization

produce residual conditions within the existing fabric. Post-earthquake spatial leftovers are associated with the large-scale reconstruction of Skopje and the implementation of new spatial structures, which generate discontinuities between planned urban interventions and existing spatial relationships. Post-transition spatial leftovers emerge from changes in ownership, regulation, development priorities, and patterns of urban use, producing conditions of uncertainty within previously established urban structures.

The comparison of these categories indicates that spatial leftovers are closely connected with moments of urban discontinuity, where planning intentions and actual spatial outcomes diverge. Rather than representing isolated physical gaps, these spaces operate as material records of urban transformation, preserving traces of previous planning decisions while simultaneously accommodating new forms of use, adaptation, and interpretation.

Discussion: Interpreting Spatial Leftovers Through Urban Transformation

Typological Differences and Urban Transformation Processes

The typological classification demonstrates that spatial leftovers should be understood as dynamic urban conditions produced through the interaction between historical processes, spatial configurations, and contemporary patterns of use. Their existence is not determined only by physical absence or functional decline, but by the changing relationships between planned structures, urban practices, and systems of spatial organization.²¹

The analysis of the Small Ring reveals that urban transformation does not completely replace previous spatial conditions; instead, different layers of development remain embedded within the urban fabric and continue to influence contemporary spatial experiences. Spatial leftovers therefore represent points where multiple temporal, morphological, and functional layers overlap, creating conditions that cannot be fully explained through conventional categories such as vacancy, abandonment, or underuse.

These findings suggest that spatial leftovers should be interpreted as integral components of the urban fabric rather than as exceptions or failures of urban development. Their ambiguous character reflects the continuous negotiation between planned intentions and everyday practices, demonstrating how urban spaces retain traces of previous transformations while simultaneously generating possibilities for new forms of use and meaning.

Spatial Leftovers as Evidence of Planning Discontinuity

The analysis reveals a recurring relationship between planning intentions and their material realization. The identified examples demonstrate that urban plans do not always result in complete and continuous spatial structures; instead, transformations may generate incomplete connections, residual areas, and spaces with uncertain roles.

21. Carmona, "The place-shaping continuum: A theory of urban design process," *Journal of Urban Design* 19, no. 1 (2013): 2-36.

Within the Small Ring, these conditions are particularly visible at locations where different urban systems intersect, including infrastructural edges, transitions between public spaces and built structures, and areas affected by incomplete spatial integration.

Rather than representing isolated exceptions, these conditions reveal moments of discontinuity within urban development, where previous decisions continue to influence present spatial configurations. Spatial leftovers therefore provide evidence of the temporal layers of the city, revealing the tensions between planned spatial order and the complex processes through which urban environments evolve.

Relationship Between Physical Conditions and Contemporary Use

The findings indicate that the present condition of spatial leftovers cannot be determined solely by their physical characteristics. The analysed cases demonstrate different relationships between spatial configuration and everyday use, ranging from conditions of limited integration to spaces that acquire new meanings through alternative forms of occupation.

Some identified spaces remain weakly connected to surrounding urban activities due to restricted accessibility, unclear boundaries, or limited functional definition. Others become activated through temporary uses, informal practices, or everyday activities that differ from their original planning intentions.

This variation demonstrates that the significance of spatial leftovers emerges through the interaction between spatial form and contemporary practices. Their role within the urban environment is continuously shaped by the relationship between existing physical conditions and the ways in which users perceive, occupy, and adapt these spaces.

Implications of the Typological Framework

The results demonstrate the value of approaching spatial leftovers through multiple interconnected dimensions rather than through a single criterion of physical absence or underuse. The developed framework enables a more differentiated interpretation of residual urban conditions by relating their origins, spatial characteristics, and contemporary manifestations.

By applying the typological approach to the Small Ring, the study demonstrates how leftover spaces can reveal broader patterns of urban transformation and provide insight into the relationship between planning processes and lived urban conditions. The framework does not aim to replace existing interpretations of these spaces, but to complement them through an analytical structure that connects historical formation with present spatial characteristics.

The findings suggest that spatial leftovers should be considered as meaningful components of the urban fabric rather than as accidental remnants of development processes. Their analysis can contribute to more context-sensitive approaches to urban planning by recognizing the potential of existing residual conditions as part of the city's spatial memory, adaptability, and future transformation.

Conclusion

This research examines spatial leftovers as urban conditions generated through different processes of transformation rather than as isolated cases of vacancy, abandonment, or spatial deficiency. By positioning these spaces within the relationship between urban form, historical development, and contemporary use, the study develops an analytical framework for understanding their physical, functional, and socio-spatial characteristics.

The analysis of Skopje's Small Ring reveals that spatial leftovers emerge through distinct historical circumstances and planning conditions. The identified post-war, post-earthquake, and post-transition categories demonstrate different relationships between planning intentions, spatial realization, and everyday urban practices. Although these categories differ in their origins and characteristics, they share a common condition of incomplete integration within the surrounding urban structure.

The proposed typological framework contributes to existing discussions on residual urban conditions by connecting historical formation with morphological characteristics and contemporary patterns of use. Rather than defining spatial leftovers only through absence or underuse, the research demonstrates their value as analytical indicators of urban transformation, revealing the tensions between planned structures and the complex processes through which urban environments evolve.

The case study of the Small Ring demonstrates that central urban areas contain not only formally recognized spaces but also residual conditions that preserve traces of previous planning decisions and spatial transformations. Recognizing these spaces as meaningful components of the urban fabric provides a basis for more context-sensitive approaches to urban analysis and future interventions.

The developed framework contributes to a broader understanding of leftover urban conditions by offering a systematic approach for their identification and interpretation. Further research can expand this approach through comparative studies of spatial leftovers in different urban contexts and investigate how such conditions may support alternative forms of urban adaptation, resilience, and spatial transformation.

Bibliography

- Ansari, A. *Rethinking urban voids: Innovative ways to revitalize lost spaces*. Thesis report. CEPT University, 2016.
- Aral, E. A. "Redefining leftover space: Value and potentiality for the city." *ITU A|Z Journal of the Faculty of Architecture* 6, no. 2 (2009): 74-84.
- Azhar, J., M. Gjerde, B. Vale, and M. Asif. "Perception of urban leftover spaces: A comparative study of built environment and non-built environment participants." *Architecture* 2, no. 2 (2022): 231-244.
- Carmona, M. "The place-shaping continuum: A theory of urban design process." *Journal of Urban Design* 19, no. 1 (2013): 2-36.
- _____. *Public places, urban spaces: The dimensions of urban design*. 3rd Edition. Routledge, 2021.
- De Certeau, M. *The practice of everyday life*. University of California Press, 1984.

- De Solà-Morales, I. "Terrain vague." In *Anyplace*, edited by C. Davidson, 118-123. Anyone Corporation, 1995.
- Franck, K. A., and Q. Stevens (Eds.) *Loose space: Possibility and diversity in urban life*. Routledge, 2007.
- Lefebvre, H. *The production of space*. Blackwell, 1991. (Original work published 1974).
- Madanipour, A. *Public and private spaces of the city*. Routledge, 2003.
- Paddison, R., and J. Sharp. "Questioning the end of public space: Reclaiming control of local banal spaces." *Scottish Geographical Journal* 123, no. 2 (2007): 87-106.
- Trancik, R. *Finding lost space: Theories of urban design*. John Wiley & Sons, 1986.