

From solidarity to contestation: spatial implications of societal and political change in Skopje, North Macedonia

De la solidaridad a la contestación: implicaciones espaciales del cambio social y político en Skopje, Macedonia del Norte

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Abstract

This paper examines the spatial transformation of Taftalidzhe, a neighbourhood in Skopje, through the lens of spatial justice, analysing its shift from socialist-era planning (1945–1991) to neoliberal urban development (1991–present). Using a longitudinal comparative case study, the study evaluates the neighbourhood's evolution across distributive, procedural, and recognition justice dimensions. A significant divergence exists between the original equitable, state-led planning and the contemporary market-driven urbanisation characterised by densification, privatisation, and weakened regulatory enforcement. The findings highlight how neoliberal redevelopment has led to the commodification of housing, reduced public space, and heightened social inequalities. Analyses indicate a substantial increase in built density, while implementing linear centers has further intensified spatial fragmentation. Additionally, weakened participatory mechanisms have marginalised long-term residents, exacerbating governance failures. The case of Taftalidzhe illustrates broader trends in post-socialist urban transformation, where speculative development and deregulation undermine spatial justice. This study underscores the need for equitable planning approaches that balance urban growth with social sustainability. By engaging with urban activism and participatory governance, cities can counteract the adverse effects of neoliberal urbanism and foster inclusive, just urban environments.

Keywords: *spatial justice; commodification; post-socialist cities; urban governance*

Resumen

Este artículo examina la transformación espacial de Taftalidzhe, un barrio de Skopje, a través del prisma de la justicia espacial, analizando su transición de la planificación socialista (1945–1991) al desarrollo urbano neoliberal (1991–presente). Mediante un estudio de caso comparativo longitudinal, se evalúa la evolución del barrio a través de las dimensiones de justicia distributiva, procedimental y de reconocimiento. La investigación revela una divergencia significativa entre la planificación estatal equitativa original y la urbanización contemporánea impulsada por el mercado, caracterizada por la densificación, la privatización y la debilitación de la regulación. Los hallazgos destacan cómo la reurbanización neoliberal ha llevado a la commodificación de la vivienda, la reducción del espacio público y el aumento de las desigualdades sociales. Los análisis

indican un aumento sustancial en la densidad edificada, mientras que la implementación de centros lineales ha intensificado aún más la fragmentación espacial. Además, el debilitamiento de los mecanismos participativos ha marginado a los residentes de larga data, exacerbando los fracasos en la gobernanza. El caso de Taftalidzhe ilustra tendencias más amplias en la transformación urbana postsocialista, donde el desarrollo especulativo y la desregulación socavan la justicia espacial. Este estudio subraya la necesidad de enfoques de planificación equitativos que equilibren el crecimiento urbano con la sostenibilidad social. A través del activismo urbano y la gobernanza participativa, las ciudades pueden contrarrestar los efectos adversos del urbanismo neoliberal y fomentar entornos urbanos inclusivos y justos.

Palabras clave: *justicia espacial; comodificación; ciudades postsocialistas; gobernanza urbana*

Bloque temático: *CIUDAD. Análisis urbano, políticas y planificación*

1. Introduction

This paper examines the spatial transformation of Taftalidzhe, a neighborhood in Skopje, North Macedonia, originally developed as part of the post-1963 earthquake reconstruction effort. Initially conceived as a temporary settlement, Taftalidzhe evolved into a fully integrated urban neighborhood through socialist-era planning that emphasized equity, accessibility, and community welfare. The study traces its evolution from this state-led, socially oriented model to the present-day landscape shaped by neoliberal urban development and market-driven dynamics.

To understand the implications of these political and economic shifts, the research applies a spatial justice framework, focusing on three interrelated dimensions: distributive justice (fairness in the spatial allocation and access of resources), procedural justice (inclusivity and transparency in decision-making processes), and recognition justice (visibility and value given to different social groups and their right to shape space through citizen-led activism and urban agency). Methodologically, the study employs a longitudinal case study approach that combines archival research, GIS-based spatial analysis using OpenStreetMap data, and a review of municipal planning documents and regulatory frameworks. This approach allows for a multi-scalar reading of transformation across housing typologies, planning practices, and resident participation.

By situating Taftalidzhe within the broader postsocialist urban transition, the paper explores how shifting governance logics have reshaped spatial configurations and local experiences of (in)justice. It contributes to critical urban studies by highlighting the dissonance between planning ideals and on-the-ground transformations in transitional societies.

2. Conceptualising spatial justice and the post socialist urban transition

Spatial justice, a growing focus in urban studies, examines the interplay between space and justice in shaping urban governance and policy. While some scholars (Marcuse, 2010) see spatial injustice as a byproduct of social injustice, others, like Soja (2010), argue that space actively shapes justice. This aligns with Lefebvre's (1991) notion of the social production of space, where spatial arrangements reinforce power structures and inequalities. Harvey (1973, 2008) and Soja (2010) provide foundational insights, linking spatial justice to capitalist urbanisation and the socio-spatial dialectic, where social and spatial processes co-construct each other. A central debate concerns distributive justice—ensuring fair allocation of resources (Rawls, 1971; Soja, 2010)—versus procedural justice, which emphasises inclusive decision-making (Young, 1990). Fainstein (2010, 2014) integrates both, advocating policies that balance equitable outcomes with participatory governance. A relational understanding of space

further enriches spatial justice by highlighting how urban policies, market forces, and socio-economic trajectories shape patterns of advantage and disadvantage (Madanipour et al., 2024). However, neoliberalism poses challenges, as market-driven policies often undermine redistributive efforts (Scruton, 2016; Hayek, 1982).

The collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe triggered urban transformations driven by market liberalization, privatization, and state withdrawal from urban governance, exacerbating spatial inequalities (Hirt & Stanilov, 2009). While socialist urban planning prioritized equitable resource distribution and collective welfare, the neoliberal transition emphasized profit-driven development, leading to gentrification, displacement, and the commodification of urban space (Vives Miró, 2011).

In Yugoslavia, urban planning balanced top-down directives with localized initiatives, involving workers' collectives, urban councils, and construction firms (Simmie, 1989). However, following Yugoslavia's dissolution, Skopje experienced profound shifts in governance, socio-economic structures, and urban space management (Bouzarovski, 2011; Mariotti & Hess, 2021). The socialist commitment to public welfare gave way to market-driven urbanism, weakening planning regulations and prioritizing private interests (Stanilov, 2007). In Skopje, as in other postsocialist cities, privatization and speculative development reshaped urban spaces, reducing social amenities and straining infrastructure (Andonova & García González, 2023; Badiu et al., 2019).

3. Taftalidzhe: A Case Study in Urban Transformation

Skopje's socialist-era planning followed modernist principles, ensuring equitable access to housing, amenities, and green spaces. The 1965 General Urban Plan (GUP) integrated residential zones with education, healthcare, and recreation facilities, fostering self-sufficient neighbourhoods (Figure 1). Schools were within walking distance, with overlapping catchment zones preventing underserved areas. A hierarchical urban structure distributed centers at multiple scales—district hubs, housing community centers, and daily needs centers—ensuring accessibility. Roads were planned hierarchically, balancing connectivity and traffic flow. Green spaces and buffer zones promoted sustainability and well-being. Housing was organised around neighbourhood units of 5,000–6,000 residents featuring multi-dwelling blocks, green areas, and social amenities.

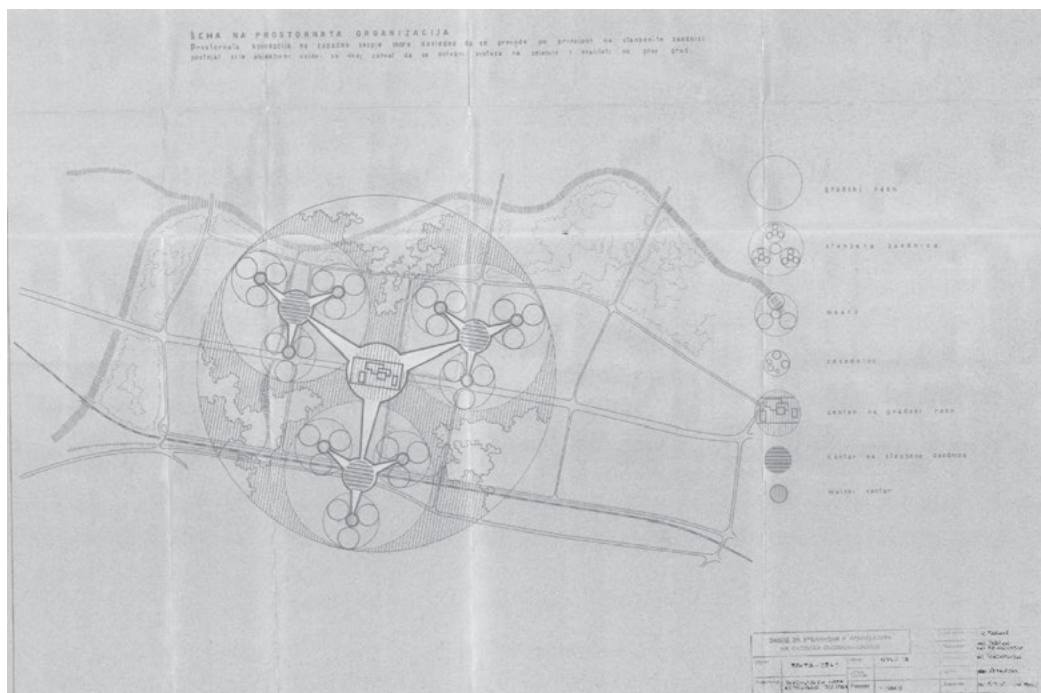


Fig. 1 *Conceptual Spatial Organization Plan.* Fuente: City Assembly of the City of Skopje (1963–1968)

To meet urgent post-earthquake housing demands in Skopje (Andonova & García González, 2024), industrialized and prefabricated construction methods were adopted, enabling the rapid development of 35,500 new dwellings, alongside 4,250 private homes constructed by residents. The neighborhood of Taftalidzhe originated as a temporary housing settlement with prefabricated homes provided by various international donors. The city's reconstruction efforts were heavily reliant on foreign aid, with multiple countries, contributing prefabricated housing units (Figure 2). These emergency settlements were initially designed as short-term housing solutions, but over time, they became formalized neighborhoods integrated into Skopje's urban fabric.

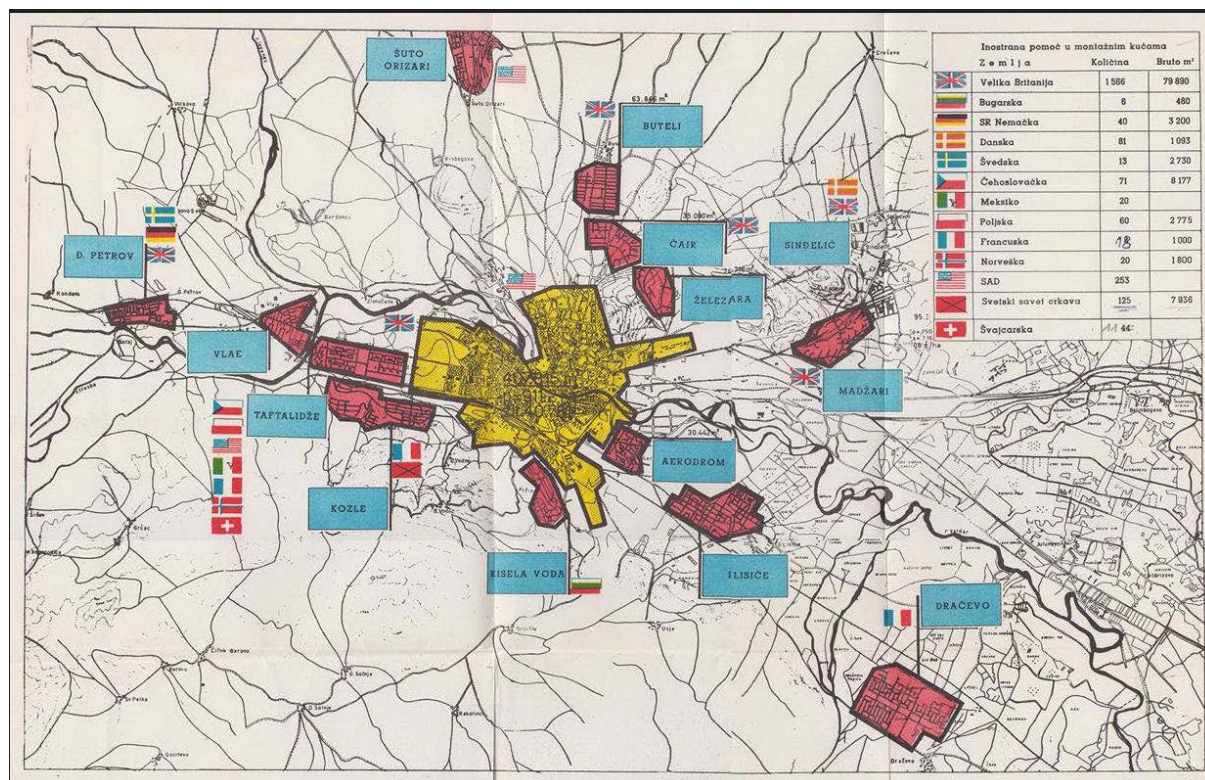


Fig. 2 Map of International Aid for Prefabricated Housing Neighbourhoods in Post-Earthquake Skopje. Fuente: Bulletin Your aid to Skopje (1963)

Technical documentation for Taftalidzhe was drafted by November 1963 by the Institute for Town Planning and Architecture in Skopje. The settlement was located west of the existing city, bordered by Partizanska Boulevard to the north, the railway line to the south, and the Vardar River to the west. The total area designated for the settlement was 106.2 hectares, encompassing the neighbourhoods of Taftalidzhe 1 and Taftalidzhe 2 (Commission for Reviewing Major Projects, 1945–1963).

The plan designated single-story dwellings, either standalone or arranged in rows. In the central zone of the neighbourhood, the plan proposed multi-story housing blocks of 5 and 9 floors (Figure 3). The plan specified that one family would occupy each housing unit or apartment.¹ Prefabricated barracks were donated by Finland, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, and Yugoslavia, providing 1,008 units. Combined with the planned 700 units in the multi-story buildings donated from Romania, the settlement had a total of 1,708 units, resulting in a gross density of 80.4 people per hectare.

¹ Unlike the USSR, where multiple families often shared a single apartment with as little as 2–5 square meters per person (International Labour Review, 1925), Yugoslav socialism, as seen in the Taftalidzhe plan, prioritized a 'one family per unit' housing policy—a key distinction between the two systems.

The street network was organised into three types of streets: access streets, collector streets and connecting streets. Public transport was positioned on the periphery of the settlement, along the main boulevards, ensuring connectivity while maintaining the internal neighborhood structure. In addition to the housing stock, the neighborhood was equipped with a range of community facilities and services, including an elementary school, a children's nursery, a kindergarten, a youth club, a venue for neighbourhood meetings, a small cinema, a library, a local clinic, a pharmacy, commercial units, restaurants, a post office, a police station, and an open-air market. This comprehensive planning approach ensured that the settlement not only provided housing but also met the daily needs of its residents. Facilities and services were carefully planned in parallel with housing to create a self-sufficient and well-integrated community (City Assembly of the City of Skopje, 1963–1968).

To the south, adjacent to the newly designed South Boulevard, 17.3 hectares were allocated for light, non-polluting industrial facilities. Additionally, a permit was issued for a center dedicated to the nourishment of children and youth, capable of serving between 40,000 and 60,000 meals daily. Educational facilities were also prioritized, with a high school and a vocational school planned within one of the neighborhood's green corridors. Along the northern edge, next to Partizanska Boulevard, a strip of land was reserved for high-rise buildings that would host 900 units. These structures, placed orthogonally to one another, were designed with ample green spaces in between to ensure a balance of density and livability. Between the two neighbourhoods, a larger local center was envisioned, which would include administrative offices, commercial units, restaurants, a post office, a bank, a pharmacy, and playgrounds for children.

The documentation anticipated that the settlement would be completed by 1980. By this time, the prefabricated temporary barracks constructed after the 1963 earthquake would be amortized and replaced with permanent dwellings, achieving a more rational residential density. The Taftalidzhe settlement was designed to accommodate 8,500 residents, with 4,765 already settled by 1966 in the newly constructed units. The achieved density was 110 inhabitants per hectare (net) and 100 inhabitants per hectare (gross). By 1965, the average family size was 4.14 persons, projected to decrease to 3.5 by 1980. Housing projections for 1980 specified the following distribution: low-rise housing (30.5%), medium-rise housing (32.8%), high-rise housing (14.4%), and single-occupancy units (14.4%), totaling 5,965 units. This would be achieved by building an additional 1116 units. Special attention was given to the placement of single-occupancy units, ensuring their proximity to the central area where much of the neighborhood's social life was expected to occur. (City Assembly of the City of Skopje, 1963–1968)

Several administrative institutions collaborated to realize the neighbourhood of Taftalidzhe. These included the Municipality of Idadija, the Board for Urbanism of the City of Skopje, and the Institute for Town Planning and Architecture. Their shared responsibility was to ensure that the development of Taftalidzhe adhered to the directions and principles established in the GUP for the City of Skopje, approved in November 1965.²

² In April 1966, an addition to the technical documentation for Taftalidzhe was made. The updated documentation categorized all developments between 1963 and 1966 as Phase One, while the new plans and specifications outlined in the document were designated as Phase Two.



Fig. 3 *Composition Plan of Taftalidzhe*. Fuente: City Assembly of the City of Skopje (1963–1968)

While the initial concept of Taftalidzhe reflected the principles of socialist urbanism—emphasizing community, equity, and functional zoning—its evolution has been marked by significant deviations. These deviations, shaped by the broader transition to a neoliberal framework, have introduced new challenges that undermine the principles of spatial justice. The following sections examine three key hindrances to spatial justice in Taftalidzhe through the lens of distributive, procedural, and recognition justice.

3.1 Hindrances to Spatial Justice in Taftalidzhe

3.1.1 Transformation of Housing: From Barracks to Multi-Family Units

While the original housing typology in Taftalidzhe emerged as a pragmatic response to the immediate post-earthquake housing crisis in 1963 the current multi-family residential buildings that dominate represent a profound departure from these original principles (Figure 4). These new housing typologies prioritize maximum land-use efficiency, often at the expense of public and green spaces. The resulting architectural landscape is characterized by higher density, reduced communal spaces, and limited integration with supporting infrastructure.



Fig. 4 *Transformation of Prefabricated Barracks in Taftalidzhe Over a Decade*. Fuente: Google Maps (2014), Author (2025)

The analysis of Gross Floor Area (GFA) across different building typologies in Taftalidzhe provides empirical evidence of a profound shift from low-density, single-family housing towards higher-density,

multi-family and mixed-use developments.³ The quantitative findings reveal a substantial increase in built-up density, with the mean GFA rising from 121.65 m² for single-story houses to 334.55 m² for multi-story houses and 3,321.53 m² for larger buildings. The median GFA also exhibits a similar upward trend, growing from 110 m² to 1,102 m², indicating that not only select buildings but a significant portion of the neighborhood has undergone densification. Further statistical indicators highlight the increasing variability in building sizes, reflecting a divergence in the built environment. The standard deviation expanded from 68.45 m² for barracks to 5,726.39 m² for the largest structures, accompanied by a sharp increase in the coefficient of variation (CV) from 0.43 to 1.72. This suggests that while some areas retain their original low-rise character, others have been transformed through large-scale redevelopment projects, leading to spatial inequalities (Figure 5). The interquartile range (IQR) further illustrates this fragmentation, expanding from 70.5 m² in the earlier dataset to 3,483.5 m² in the most recent, reflecting the widening gap between smaller, residual low-density housing and newly constructed large-scale apartment complexes.

Spatial clustering analysis of building density reinforces these quantitative findings, revealing distinct zones of transformation within Taftalidzhe. High-density developments are concentrated along main roads and central areas, with clusters of large apartment blocks emerging in specific zones rather than being evenly distributed across the neighborhood. This pattern suggests a targeted approach to redevelopment, where infrastructural accessibility and market speculation play a decisive role in determining land-use change. The spatial fragmentation of densification patterns further suggests that redevelopment has been guided by ad-hoc decision-making, with private sector investments shaping the urban form rather than a structured zoning or planning framework. This analysis quantitatively and spatially substantiates the argument that Taftalidzhe's transformation has been driven by fragmented, investment-oriented urban redevelopment, resulting in increased spatial inequalities.



Fig. 5 *Typological Transformation of Housing in Taftalidzhe.* Fuente: Author (2025)

³ The quantitative data was obtained through a field survey conducted by the author in 2025, during which each building's footprint, typology, and number of levels were recorded on foot and manually cross-referenced due to gaps in the available OSM data. These observations were then used to update OpenStreetMap (OSM) data, allowing for the construction of a comprehensive building dataset. Using this updated dataset, spatial analysis were done in QGIS.

This transition highlights a significant mismatch between the land-use zoning regulations established during the socialist era and the actual development patterns in the neoliberal period. The original urban plans envisioned a balanced mix of low-rise and medium-rise housing, integrated with public spaces and community services. However, weak regulatory enforcement and the prioritization of private capital have led to widespread deviations from these plans. Recent private developments have been exclusively focused on residential housing, with no parallel investment in public spaces or social amenities, further exacerbating the strain on existing infrastructure and diminishing neighborhood livability. These practices have disrupted the spatial and functional coherence of Taftalidzhe, undermining the neighborhood's capacity to balance residential, commercial, and public uses.

In recent years, the municipality has pushed for denser redevelopment in Taftalidzhe, often at the expense of green and public spaces, sparking resident resistance. Civic groups have opposed what they call an "urban mafia" and reckless urbanization, citing infrastructure strain, flooding, and pollution. In 2016-2017, residents blocked park construction through protests, vigils, and live barricades, highlighting governance failures. Beyond activism, cultural events fostered community solidarity and a vision for a more sustainable neighbourhood. These concerns have been widely documented through resident-led activism, including posts, videos, and calls to action published on the official Facebook pages of community initiatives such as Зелено Тафталиџе (Green Taftalidže) and Жителите на Карпош (Residents of Karpoš).

3.1.2 The Impact of Linear Centers on Urban Coherence

Socialist urban planning in Yugoslavia was closely intertwined with the country's five-year economic plans, particularly during the period of self-management initiated in the 1950s. The introduction of workers' self-management aimed to decentralise socio-economic planning, allowing for a more flexible and participatory approach to urban development. This shift was reflected in the planning processes, where local enterprises and administrative units contributed to the drafting of federal social plans (Bojić, 2018). The five-year plans provided a framework that aimed to coordinate economic growth with urban development (Uka, 2023).

After 1991, urban planning became fragmented, driven by privatisation and market forces. Public participation declined, and regulations struggled to control informal and speculative developments (Stefanovska & Kozelj, 2012). The 2012 GUP introduced linear centers to promote accessibility and economic activity, but their implementation intensified density beyond planned limits, straining infrastructure and services. With a shallow 25-meter depth, these centers caused functional spillover into adjacent areas, disrupting urban coherence. Poorly placed and loosely regulated, they have often undermined established planning principles rather than improving urban conditions. The 2012 GUP designated two primary linear centers in Taftalidzhe along the major traffic corridors to the east and south. Their implementation revealed systemic flaws in urban governance, particularly in adapting the concept to local needs and ensuring integration with the existing urban fabric.

One of the designated linear centers, models the challenges and controversies of neoliberal urbanism. Procedural irregularities marred the development of the project, undermining principles of transparency and public participation. The DUP was controversially approved on the eve of Christmas Eve 2016. This timing minimized public scrutiny, limited media coverage, and excluded residents from critical discussions, as reported by investigative journalists documenting the planning irregularities in Taftalidzhe (IRL, 2023). Public consultations were superficial, and residents' concerns about the project's impact on their quality of life were disregarded. The project also violated key urban planning principles and regulatory frameworks. The development, which encompasses a gross built area of approximately 60,000 m² and includes a massive residential and commercial complex of nearly 500 units, drastically increased the neighborhood's density. These dimensions far exceeded the parameters set by the GUP, which regulates maximum population density and height-to-area ratios. The building's

height of 38 meters and its imposing bulk disrupted the established urban fabric, straining local infrastructure and exacerbating issues such as parking shortages, traffic congestion, and insufficient waste management capacity (Figure 6).



Fig. 6 *Transformation of Public Green Space into a Linear Center in Taftalidzhe*

Community representatives and local environmental advocates raised serious concerns about the ecological and spatial impacts of the proposed development, noting that the monolithic structure would overshadow existing homes, impede air circulation, and reduce environmental quality. These criticisms were echoed in public statements calling for the revision of the DUP in Taftalidzhe to better align with principles of sustainable and humane urban design (DOM, 2016). The project in Taftalidzhe faced significant backlash from residents and activists, culminating in the abolition of the DUP by the Constitutional Court of North Macedonia in 2018.⁴

⁴ This was a Pyrrhic victory, as the slow legal proceedings (2016–2018) allowed significant portions of the plan to be executed before the Constitutional Court's decision.

The second linear center, situated on the former industrial site of the Alumina factory in the southeast corner of Taftalidzhe, remains unbuilt and officially unplanned due to the abolition of the DUP in 2018. However, its proposed development has already sparked widespread public outcry, highlighting the deep systemic issues in urban governance and planning.

The newly proposed DUP for Alumina envisions a high-density urban complex. The plan aims to accommodate 1,520 new residents and approximately 2,000 vehicles. While the 3D visualizations presented by the local municipality showcase modern buildings with green terraces and landscaped areas, the reality of the plan, as noted by local residents and activists, paints a starkly different picture. The lack of sufficient public spaces, green areas, and essential amenities such as schools and kindergartens underscores the plan's prioritization of profit over community welfare. The environmental impact of the proposed Alumina center is a critical point of contention. The towering 35-story buildings, would cast shadows over neighboring homes, blocking sunlight and reducing the quality of life for existing residents. Furthermore, the development threatens to eliminate the open space currently available on the site, a vital resource for a neighborhood already lacking in green and recreational areas.

The planning process for the Alumina site has been criticized for its lack of transparency and inclusivity. Public consultations have been described as superficial, with residents feeling excluded from meaningful participation in the decision-making process. During a public presentation of the proposed DUP, residents highlighted the lack of responses to their concerns and the absence of municipal representatives during critical discussions. Activists have also pointed out that the current public participation mechanisms are inadequate, as only residents living directly within the planning area have the right to submit formal objections,⁵ excluding many long-term Taftalidzhe residents from the process.

Despite these challenges, the early stage of planning for Alumina presents an opportunity for corrective action. Public resistance, combined with lessons learned, could influence the development process and push for a more participatory and equitable approach. Incorporating meaningful community input, ensuring adherence to planning regulations, and prioritizing public spaces and green infrastructure are essential steps toward aligning the project with principles of spatial justice.

3.1.3 Decline and Loss of Domche (Local Community Center)

Local community centers in Yugoslavia, known as mesne zajednice, played a significant role in the socio-political landscape of the country, particularly through the framework of self-management. They were designed to foster direct citizen participation in decision-making processes and served as platforms where residents could express their needs and preferences regarding local development, including urban planning, housing, and communal services (Duda, 2023).

Domche, a local community center in Taftalidzhe, was conceived as an essential part of the neighborhood unit concept. It was one of the smallest examples of Brutalist architecture, and served as a multifunctional space for the local community. Initially, Domche provided temporary shelter for families displaced by the 1963 Skopje earthquake, but it quickly evolved into a cultural, sports, and recreational hub, supporting various local community activities.

⁵ This restriction is particularly illogical given that the site is a former industrial area with no current residents, effectively barring any public participation.



Fig. 7 *The Abandoned Domche Local Community Center.* Fuente: Author (2025)

The transition from a socialist to a neoliberal market economy after 1991 introduced new ownership structures that deeply impacted Domche. Following the enactment of the Law on Denationalization (2000), ownership of the community center was transferred from the municipality to a private party. Relying on the now-abolished DUP from 2018, the new owners proposed demolishing the center to construct a hotel complex. However, the site's legal status remains contested, and an ongoing legal dispute is currently underway regarding the ownership and management of the property.

In the meantime, in 2022, the National Conservation Centre granted Domche a temporary status as a protected heritage site, aiming to safeguard it from demolition and further degradation (National Conservation Centre – Skopje, Ref. No. 02-556/1). Several community-led movements have organized performative events, exhibitions, and public discussions to underscore Domche's historical, cultural, and social significance. Notably, the performative installation *City as a Stage – Lost Modernist Utopias* (2023), staged in front of Domche, transformed public space into a platform for collective memory, community reflection, and resistance against its erasure through privatization. The interdisciplinary project involved artists, researchers, and local students in reimagining Domche as both a cultural artifact and a civic space.

The loss of Domche has led to a profound erosion of local identity, as the absence of a shared community hub has significantly reduced opportunities for collective engagement and cultural expression. Without a dedicated space for social interaction, social networks have weakened, diminishing intergenerational relationships and local support systems that once thrived within the neighborhood.

4. Conclusion

This paper has examined the spatial transformation of Taftalidzhe as to explore the impacts of political and economic shifts on urban justice. Through the framework of spatial justice—distributive, procedural, and recognition justice—the study has illustrated how the transition from socialist planning to neoliberal urban governance has reshaped access to housing, public space, and participatory decision-making. The case of Taftalidzhe highlights the profound effects of market-driven urban policies on spatial equity and the challenges of maintaining inclusive, just urban environments in a post-socialist context.

One of the most significant findings of this study is the shift in housing typologies and the resultant distributive injustices. The transition from prefabricated, low-rise housing to high-density speculative developments has led to spatial inequalities, reduced affordability, and the erosion of green and communal spaces (Figure 8). Beyond housing, the study has demonstrated how procedural injustices have shaped the urban evolution of Taftalidzhe. The approval processes for new developments, exemplified by the linear centres, reveal a pattern of governance that systematically excludes residents from meaningful participation in urban decision-making. Public consultations are often superficial, regulatory frameworks are selectively enforced, and decisions frequently prioritize investor interests over community needs. This pattern not only undermines democratic planning but also exacerbates distrust between residents and local authorities, weakening the social fabric of the neighborhood. Recognition justice remains another critical dimension of spatial transformation in Taftalidzhe. The decline and eventual loss of Domche illustrates the broader marginalization of collective spaces in the neoliberal urban agenda. The erasure of historically and socially significant spaces disregards the cultural and communal needs of long-term residents, reinforcing spatial injustices that extend beyond material inequalities to include symbolic exclusion from the urban landscape.

The implications of these findings extend beyond Taftalidzhe to broader discussions on postsocialist urban governance and the neoliberalization of urban space. The case of Taftalidzhe reflects a wider pattern observed across post-socialist cities, where deregulation, privatization, and weak institutional oversight have facilitated speculative development at the expense of spatial equity. These trends highlight the urgent need for a recalibration of urban planning policies to better align with principles of justice and inclusivity.



Fig. 8 *The Transformation of Taftalidzhe into a Contested Urban Landscape.* Fuente: Micko Damjanovski (2024)

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