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**ON THE BOOK 'WARSAW SKETCHES SKOPJE' [POL. WARSZAWA RYSUJE SKOPJE]
(2022) BY DR. KINGA NETTMANN-MULTANOWSKA**

- review -

Introduction

The book *Warsaw Sketches Skopje* [pol. *Warszawa rysuje Skopje*] (2022), authored by Dr. Kinga Nettmann-Multanowska, was published in Polish at the beginning of the year by the Center for Architecture (Centrum Architektury) in Warsaw. This is the first authorial work dedicated to Skopje by Nettmann-Multanowska, a doctor of sciences in the field of linguistics and English, who has spent several years in Macedonia during the last decade. I will discuss the author's engagements in Skopje later in the text. Here, it is worth emphasizing that the Architecture Center is a foundation and publishing house founded in 2011, whose guiding principle has been the popularization of architecture, architectural theory and contemporary urban studies. As such, the Center has not only published several authored texts and translations, but has also organized – and still organizes – exhibitions, lectures and thematic walks with specialized guides and experts. Therefore, it should be pointed out with pride that, thanks to the author, *Skopje*, as a part of the title, is already on the same shelf – both online and offline – with the latest translations and studies of Le Corbusier and Jane Jacobs, as well as architectural guides for central Warsaw and Kaunas, to give an example – authors and topics that are undoubtedly of greater interest to local audiences. The book itself contains slightly less than 500 pages, nine appendices, a huge number of archival and authored photos, a chronology of the main events and short biographies of the main protagonists – the Polish experts who worked in Skopje at the height of the post-earthquake reconstruction of the city. The purpose of this overview essay is to map some of Nettmann-Multanowska's main arguments and methods without analyzing the abundance of details and nuances covered in the book. On the eve of the Macedonian translation – which I sincerely hope will happen as soon as possible – I will also try to bring the Polish social and publishing context closer to the Macedonian reader, because I think that it is necessary in order to get a broader picture of the value of this research and work.

In the majority of her text, Nettmann-Multanowska offers an opportunity to reexamine the recent history of Skopje through the lens of Polish-Macedonian and Yugoslav cultural and political cooperation from the 1960s and early 1970s. In terms of genre, the book has already been defined as a “historical reportage” by critics (Bochenek 2022; Architektura Murator 2022): a boundary discourse at the border of documentary, travelopic prose, memoir and fiction, which blossomed on the Polish post-war scene with the appearance of the well-known and locally translated Ryszard Kapuściński, and has been institutionalized and promoted by several large publishing houses. In the last few years, several historical reports concerning post-war Polish architectural and urban heritage have also appeared (e.g. Springer 2011; Chomałowska 2016; Piątek 2020) whose authors elaborate on several historical themes through which they articulate attitudes on contemporary events related to architecture, public spaces and urban development. Nettmann-Multanowska uses this technique to do post-factum justice to Skopje - a city with a large number of residents, perhaps the only ones in the world, survived two mega-construction projects in their lifetimes: post-earthquake reconstruction and “Skopje 2014” - whose current landscape is often the subject of ridicule. So too have the Polish experts who dedicated a significant part of their lives and careers to the construction of the city, while their involvement has been forgotten or, at the very least, is in the shadow of the “starchitect” Kenzō Tange. Neglect is the case in both national environments: almost 60 years after the earthquake, the role of the Polish group of experts and their contribution to the reconstruction of the Macedonian capital are equally unknown in Warsaw and in Skopje, and similarly to Skopje residents and foreign visitors to the city, Polish residents in Skopje are amused with the new urban look of the center of Skopje.¹ And it is precisely at this point that Nettmann-Multanowska intervenes; as a linguist and interpreter, the author tries to bring the two cultures closer together through the numerous and various aspects of the history of post-earthquake solidarity and unusual stories of the Polish and Macedonian witnesses of the events and connoisseurs of today’s occasions. The author goes one step further and, in the function of a most authentic cross-cultural translation, offers, among other things, renditions - often her own - of Macedonian poetry, documents, and even menus, supplementing them with her archival research in Warsaw and Skopje. To use anthropological jargon, Nettmann-Multanowska alternately, but precisely, positions herself emically and etically throughout her story, drawing and erasing borders between the two cultures, languages and histories, while the frequent changes of this positioning are mostly the result of supranational events and political developments that will be discussed below.

Nettmann-Multanowska’s book is the crown of her engagement and work in Skopje. Namely, it was Nettmann-Multanowska and the team from the Polish embassy in Skopje, headed by her husband and the then-Polish ambassador, Jacek Multanowski, who were the most important actors in the restoration of memories and the rethinking

1 For illustration, two recent Warsaw exhibitions - “Alexander” by the photographer Michał Siarek (2018) and “Spomenik. Central-Eastern Europe 1918-2018” [pol. Pomnik. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia 1918-2018] (2018) - problematized the “Skopje 2014” project as populist and nationalist kitsch.

of the history of Polish aid in the city after the 1963 earthquake. They prepared, among others, the online exhibition “Skopje. Art of solidarity” [pol. Skopje. Sztuka Solidarności] in the mid-2010s, establishing the student award in the name of the “Warsaw Tigers” at the Faculty of Architecture in Skopje (see the 2014 brochure), The exhibition was dedicated to Polish aid for post-earthquake Skopje - “Skopje. City, architecture, and art of solidarity” [pol. Skopje. Miasto, architektura i sztuka solidarności] - which was staged in Krakow’s International Center of Culture in 2019. The exhibition led to public talks and lectures by Polish experts who worked in Skopje - probably the first of such opportunities after their return from the city. In general, Nettmann-Multanowska is one of the most vocal promoters of the Polish cultural and building heritage in North Macedonia, and it is a pleasing fact that the author continues to talk about the importance of Skopje and post-earthquake solidarity for bilateral relations between the two countries and contacts between the two cultures. More specifically, the book was already promoted in Warsaw, Krakow, Poznań and Legnica. Since then, in less than two months, the author participated in several literary festivals, podcasts in Polish and English and gave several interviews (e.g. Cymer 2022; Szpala & Nettmann-Multanowska 2022).

But Nettmann-Multanowska’s book can also be read as one of the most extensive works from the series of recent editions of living testimonies about the earthquake and the post-earthquake reconstruction of Skopje. More specifically, during recent years, several Macedonian researchers have spoken with Polish experts who worked in post-earthquake Skopje: Bojan Blazevski, who published a feature on this topic in 2017 (Blazevski 2017), Pavel Veljanoski, who collaborated with the team that prepared the Krakow exhibition and published a text in the anthology regarding that project (Veljanoski 2019), and hopefully serving as a modest contribution is also this text dedicated to the first major sociological study in Skopje conducted by Polish and Macedonian experts (Trajanovski 2021bb).² Apart from the experts, within the last year, “non-expert” memories of the earthquake and post-earthquake reconstruction were published: the text of Blaž Andoljšek published in *EthnoAnthropoZoom* (Andoljšek 2021), the collection of over 50 personal testimonies published by the Skopje Center for the Research of Nationalism and Culture (Trajanovski, & Todorov 2021) and two articles on the role of earthquake memories and reconstruction in the latest memory disputes in the city published, again, in *EthnoAnthropoZoom* (Crvenkovska Risteska 2020; Hadzievska 2020). This discourse is dedicated to the personal testimonies of the citizens of Skopje, the participants and the architects of the post-earthquake reconstruction. It will undoubtedly enable a better understanding of the moments of the natural disaster, the days, months and years after the earthquake, and also the formation and development of memories related to the earthquake and the reconstruction of the city - aspects that are of incredible importance for today’s debates, local policies and solutions regarding this period of Skopje’s history.

2 It should be mentioned here that two renowned Polish institutions, the Ośrodek Karta Foundation and the institute Narodowy Instytut Architektury i Urbanistyki, recently deposited oral histories and interviews with some of the Polish experts who worked, among other things, on the plan for Skopje.

Warsaw sketches Skopje

Nettmann-Multanowska begins her story, conditionally, from the beginning: the fateful July morning of 1963. The author sets this given date not only as an occasion for the contingencies and histories that follow, but also for the pre-histories of the main protagonists and events, stretching it up and down, along and across space and time. So, alongside the parallel drawn with personal encounters of the series of Skopje earthquakes in 2016, in the first chapter we learn that the Skopje earthquake also hides several “Polish” stories: the first, about the Polish family of four living in the newly built buildings in Karpoš, who tragically died in the earthquake, except for ‘little Teresa’, and about the trio of Polish engineers on official stay in the city who, as Polish newspapers later reported, escaped the tragedy due to their random choice of hotel. According to official reports from 1963, a total of 46 foreign citizens died in the Skopje earthquake (more on July 26, 1963, 176), and the author’s introduction is another fine indicator of the supranational character of natural disasters – an aspect that, somewhat suggestively, is more present in the reports of the Macedonian media during the first few post-earthquake years than in recent media articles (see in: Trajanovski, & Todorov, 2021). Furthermore, the author reconstructs the first post-earthquake days from a Polish perspective, with Polish eyes and sentiments. Hence, in this section, we also read about prof. Witold Doroszewski, who first sent a letter to Blaže Koneski after the earthquake, but also about the stay of Nobel laureate Wysława Szymborska and two other Polish writers in Skopje in November 1963 - hosted by Koneski himself.

The second part refers to the history of Skopje up to the catastrophic earthquake of 1963. Besides basic biographical data about the city, Nettmann-Multanowska gives a brief overview of Polish academic literature - one of the few academic provenances where Skopje and Macedonia are systematically studied, and Macedonian studies are institutionalized in several locations³ - and offers a review of the creation of the Polish visualizations of Skopje, Macedonia and Yugoslavia as a “terrain for tourism” (Nettmann-Multanowska 2022:, 41). More specifically, regarding the second point, Nettmann-Multanowska compares three Polish tourist guides published in the 20th century: in 1903, 1935 and 1966. The author reads these texts factually as token evidence in support of the history of Macedonian-Polish cultural contacts: exactly in the first guide, for illustration, the author outlines information about the pre-war Skopje soda-water factory of the Pole Dobzhanjski yet also disputes their authors. Here, her reading and interpretation of the Polish tourist guide to Albania and Macedonia from 1903, authored by Włodzimierz

3 Here, for the Macedonian audience, we should mention the capital research of Irena Stawowy-Kawka, Piotr Majewski, quoted in the book, but also those of Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska i.e. 2009), Jolanta Sujecka (Jolanta Sujecka, i.e. 2013) and Lukaš Galusek (Łukasz Galusek), as well as texts dedicated to Skopje by Polish researchers Koziura (Koziura, 2014), Falski (Falski, 2015), Rogoś (Rogoś, 2019) and Kapusta (Kapusta, 2019), among others, published in English.

Trampczyński, is interesting. Where Nettmann-Multanowska suggests that the author did not understand well enough some of the social and political aspects of the Macedonian state and nation-building. However, the subtext of the Polish discourse about Skopje before the earthquake is rather orientalizing, with an emphasis on cultural and religious diversity in the city – a prism that, in a different form, also appears among the Polish experts who arrived in the city after the 1963 earthquake.

The third part is dedicated to Polish aid for post-earthquake Skopje. This extremely rich account is the result of archival research, including some scarcely available materials from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and a re-reading of journalistic articles devoted to Skopje from that period. Namely, by November 1963, 13 Polish journalists will have visited Skopje, and catastrophic tropes then prevailed in the reports, often comparing post-earthquake Skopje with post-war Warsaw – one of the most destroyed cities from the whirlwind of the Second World War. The author describes how Polish society and the then government of the People's Republic of Poland mobilized after the earthquake and, especially, after Tito's call for help to the Macedonian capital. So, one of the first planes to land at the grassy Skopje airport at the end of July 1963 was Polish, carrying supplies of blood, and soon after, the Polish government's donation of 30 housing barracks. Nettmann-Multanowska determines that there were several decisive factors for such expeditious Polish aid to the destroyed Skopje: on the one hand, the relaxation of Polish-Yugoslav political relations after the death of Stalin and the fresh memories in Poland of the Yugoslav youth that worked side by side to clear the ruins in Warsaw, and on the other hand, the engagement and professional baggage of Adolf Ciborowski – the then city architect of Warsaw. He pitched, with a corporate vocabulary, the Polish version of the plan for the reconstruction of Skopje on a napkin in front of Tito and Stanisław Jankowski. Both architects and urban planners, formative for the reconstruction of the Polish capital, recognized in the Skopje tragedy a chance to promote Polish urban planning expertise and share experiences from the reconstruction of Warsaw. And so – in a state of urgency, with strong personal involvement and in relatively favorable conditions in socialist Europe – the story of Polish urban planning and architectural expert assistance to Skopje began.

Polish expert assistance for the destroyed Skopje

In short, Ciborowski and Jankowski arrived in the city in early September, 1963, while at the same time an expert team was formed in Warsaw with the aim of helping Yugoslav and Macedonian urban planners. After the coordination of the UN and the Skopje Institute of Urbanism, in April of 1964, the organization of international activities for the urban planning of Skopje began and the Polish team, headed by Ciborowski and Jankowski, received an invitation to develop an alternative plan for Skopje. Several members of the Polish team flew to Skopje in April, 1964 to collect the necessary materials and, immediately after returning to Warsaw, began to prepare the Polish version of the

city plan. Less than three months later, the plan was presented in Ohrid before the International Board of the UN and domestic and foreign experts, together with the Greek proposal of Doxiadis Studio. Finally, to the great satisfaction of the Polish team, both the Polish and Greek teams received contracts for the development of the general urban plan of the Macedonian capital. Perhaps the most interesting part of Nettmann-Multanowska's story regarding this period of post-earthquake reconstruction comes from her conversations with the members of the first Polish "Skopje" team - especially with Prof. Wojciech Suchorzewski and Dr. Juliusz Wilski. Namely, it is precisely the personal testimonies of the Polish experts that provide insight into some suggestive episodes unavailable in the archives and journalistic texts: for illustration, the team gathered under the baton of Ciborowski and Jankowski quickly and without much understanding of the current, Warsaw-based obligations of the experts, the pioneering computer technology of the Poles, but also that the Polish experts worked on the first plan for Skopje without any financial compensation. In Ohrid, the Polish plan was presented by Jankowski: the only one, according to Wilski's memories, who knew English, although others, de facto, participated more in its preparation (Jankowski, on the other hand, was also the deputy head of the Department of Urbanism of the city of Warsaw at that time). "But none of us protested about it" - Wilski will say almost six decades later, and Nettmann-Multanowska will convey, "although under normal circumstances two such types would certainly eat each other" (Nettmann-Multanowska 2022,: 103).

It is this spirit of cooperation of the Polish team that is the premise of the next chapter, dedicated to the reconstruction of Warsaw,= and the critical context for Polish participation in the reconstruction of Skopje. And here, again, Nettmann-Multanowska applies her method of reading historical events through artifacts from, conditionally, the other culture. This time she draws a picture of post-war Warsaw from Macedonian sources: the Polish language textbook from 1959. In this section, we get the full picture of the interpersonal and professional relationships of Polish architects and urban planners from the Warsaw Polytechnic, which were shaped by joint participation in the wartime resistance, studies in post-war Poland and, especially, Warsaw, as well as participation in the construction of the Polish capital. In the post-war period, several key institutions for the reconstruction of Warsaw were established, headed by the Bureau for the reconstruction of the capital [pol. Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy] (and Polservis, later mentioned in the text, which regulated the foreign engagements of Polish experts), which also turned out to become the basis for recruiting experts who worked on the plan for Skopje. Nettmann-Multanowska describes the fledgling Poles who work in impossible conditions in their post-war homeland, facing countless difficult issues and compromises, with almost no rest and extremely rare business trips abroad. For them, the work in Skopje, back in the late 60s, proved to be a springboard for further work abroad, mainly within the framework of UN projects. As Bogdan Wyporek writes in his book: memories, transmitted by the author, "[n]one of us imagined then that the events in Skopje, so far from Warsaw, would change our professional careers and lives to many of us" (Nettmann-Multanowska 2022,: 137).

The next chapter is dedicated to the reconstruction of Skopje. Nettmann-Multanowska begins this section by charting the peak of Polish-Yugoslav relations in the early 1960s, emphasizing the image of Tito and, to a lesser extent, the role of Władysław Gomułka - the leader of the “Polish October” of 1956 - and hopes for the liberalization of the Polish People’s Republic. But at the same time, the challenges in Skopje are presented as significantly different from these top-level diplomatic ceremonies. And here, again, according to the recollections of Polish experts – in this case, Stanisław Furman – we learn that KCiborowski and Jankowski requested that the Polish team not be treated inappropriately considering the situation in the city. So, they were assigned a modest motel in Gjoŕče Petrov (today’s municipality building), then a distant periphery of the city, where nearly daily, there were problems with electricity and water. But the Poles - and the Polish Maria Niemczyk, the only expert woman from this Polish line-up - quickly managed to get used to these conditions: they take turns preparing breakfasts, travel daily to their workplaces in the Institute, enjoy excursions around Macedonia and Yugoslavia, organize birthday and holiday celebrations, have long discussions in the Gjoŕče Petrov motel and socialize with colleagues from abroad, all without a single memorable conflict within the group. In Polish memories, the theme of the warm reception by Macedonian women and men prevails: the colleagues and professional partners from the Institute and the City, with whom they remained in contact even after the end of the engagement in Skopje, but also with the locals, neighbors and hosts with whom they met daily. And who, in turn, looked with special sympathy at the loud group from Poland - one of the few foreign teams in the city whose language and worldviews were relatively close to the Macedonian ones. In Furman’s words: “we were a numerous, but connected and cheerful group, we moved together, we were visible! We were talked about. And we were proud to be together with the whole world” (Nettmann-Multanowska 2022: 168).

What are the main benefits of Polish expert assistance in Skopje? Nettmann-Multanowska singles out several such aspects in this chapter. First of all, the “Warsaw way” of working immediately became a standard in the Institute: preparation of several alternative solutions with the aim of the fastest possible decision by the management board, while coordinating the results of the work of several working groups in parallel and using all possible verbal and non-verbal - mainly sketching and drawings - methods of communication between colleagues from different countries. The Poles also coordinated the work of the sociological study in the preparatory phase for the general urban plan which is an extremely interesting episode of the post-earthquake reconstruction of the city, crucial in terms of some urban solutions and, unfortunately, already forgotten in the 80s (more in Trajanovski 2021b). Unburdened by minority and ethnic issues, Polish urban planners, architects and sociologists arrived in Skopje with some knowledge and expectations from the then-developed Yugoslavia, and they were welcomed by a city with a difficult history of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations and latent conflicts between communities. But the Polish sociologists, according to prof. Dr. Zbigniew Sufin, felt challenged by this task and it was they, together with the Macedonian collaborators, who first emphasized the necessity of recognizing the different needs of the ethnic,

cultural and religious communities in the new plan for Skopje. Finally, towards the end of 1965, the general urban plan for the city was submitted, whose public promotion was attended by a high-profile Polish delegation headed by the then-Polish Prime Minister, Józef Cyrankiewicz. The Polish group participated in nearly all aspects, and several Polish experts from the so-called Third Skopje team remained to work in Skopje even after the end of this phase of the UN project. According to Polish experts, however, their expertise and involvement are the most deserving of credit for the equitable, balanced and multidirectional development of Skopje, as well as for some of the key solutions in the city's transport system. As Jankowski concluded in a letter to his Polish colleagues after the end of his engagement, "The work was neither simple nor easy. But we finished it. Passionate urban work, significant experience of working with foreign colleagues, a great lesson" (Nettmann-Multanowska 2022,: 268).

After the reconstruction

The section that follows refers to perhaps the most colloquially-known episode of Polish aid to post-earthquake Skopje: the Museum of Contemporary Art on Skopje's Kale as well as the gifts to Skopje and the Skopje museum of more than 200 works of art by 135 Polish artists. Nettmann-Multanowska goes a level deeper than the conventional knowledge about the museum project and refers to the crisis in Polish-Yugoslav relations caused by the Prague Spring, its quick resolution, the engagement of the first director of the museum, Boris Petkovski, the work of the Warsaw "Tigers" in Poland, the winning Skopje project and the project for the museum of the Polish visionary, sculptor and architect, Oskar Hansen.

The works of art arrived in Skopje in several collections in the mid-60s, and Nettmann-Multanowska notes that, according to the total number of donated works, this represents one of the largest collections of Polish contemporary art outside of Polish borders. Finally, the MOC was opened to the public on November 13, 1970, the day of the liberation of Skopje, and as an object and institution, it was left in the background after the independence of the Republic of Macedonia. In this context, the author, quite by chance, discovers the Polish collection in the Skopje MOC, after which an expert team from Poland would be mobilized, and, in a relatively short time, the works exhibited in Skopje and Krakow - an episode that was covered in the introduction of this essay.

The last part refers to the "Skopje 2014 project" and the initiative to save the City Trade Center (GTC). These two recent topics, according to the author, are fully indicative of the local attitude towards the building and symbolic heritage of the city's reconstruction in the 1960s and 1970s: on the one hand, carelessness, ignoring and destruction, and on the other hand, protection, preservation and rethinking. Nettmann-Multanowska, besides noting that the figure of the former Polish Minister of Foreign

Affairs, Bronisław Geremek, was found on the new building of the Macedonian MFA, also refers to some famous women and men from Skopje and conveys their thoughts about the city and its past and future. I, on the other hand, find the choice of the GTC rescue initiative interesting and suggestive in this context. In contrast, for example, with the initiative to save “Tito’s letters” which is more directly linked to memories of the earthquake and reconstruction (for an overview, see: Trajanovski 2021a). My humble opinion is that, through this choice, the author primarily addresses the Polish readers, conveying to them a story of the rescue of a modernist building from the socialist past in conditions of radical changes in the urban landscape set a context where these changes take place with nearly no consultation of the local population. Here, it should be mentioned that recent Polish history points to a similar political treatment of the construction heritage of socialism wherein, after 1989, the socialist construction paradigm would lose its legitimacy “overnight” (Grubbauer, & Kusiak 2012, : 13–14), property would be privatized, and public spaces would begin to shrink and be covered in concrete (Mencwel 2020), while several representative buildings – such as, Warsaw’s “Supersam” and the main railway station in Katowice, designed by the aforementioned Tigers – would be demolished despite the involvement of local communities (Springer 2011; Cymer 2019). Such developments led to strong civic activism for the right to the city in the early 2000s, institutional engagement (see, for example, Fudala 2016), and also increased academic interest in the socialist construction heritage (e.g. Stanek 2020). These activities will lead to a reconsideration of not only the new and the old, but also of the current paradigms in relation to urban problems during Polish socialism. In addition to conveying this successful Skopje story, this part of Nettmann-Multanowska’s book also sounds activist and the author is clear in her desire for a European Skopje.

To the two members of the “Skopje” team,
Juliusz Wilski (1923 – 2022) and Zbigniew Galperin (1929 – 2021).

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