The Project "Skopje 2014": Between Social Cohesion and Social Disintegration

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Abstract: In this paper we shall posit that the "Skopje 2014" Project, proposed and realized by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, is one form of reaction to the efforts made to dispute the Macedonian identity and as such has direct effect on Macedonia's strategic goal to join EU and NATO as an equal member. In a situation of "threatened identity", the Project aims, through "collection of memory" and its spatial integration, to recreate Macedonian identity through the construction of a narrative about its continuity from antiquity to the present day. The strategies for "a top down"implementation of the "politics of memory" is to promote the idea of the "glorious and heroic past" of the Macedonian nation. Having in mind that the Project is being implemented in the very centre of Skopje, the capital of the Republic of Macedonia, its realisation concerns not only the local population but the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia in general. Having in mind that the Project very controversial reception goal of research is to define the issues that make this so provocative and, by that, attempt to answer the question if the "Skopje 2014" Project contributes to social cohesion or social disintegration.

Keywords: identity, collection of memory, politics of memory, "Skopje2014" Project, reception, social cohesion/division

...[T]HE STATE IS INVISIBLE; IT MUST BE PERSONIFIED BEFORE IT CAN BE SEEN, SYMBOLIZED BEFORE IT CAN BE LOVED, IMAGINED BEFORE IT CAN BE CONCEIVED.
(WALZER 1967 IN ZELINSKY 1988)

I. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the "Skopje 2014" Project, it seems, was motivated by the realisation that "if we are not telling ourselves the right narratives, then we cannot imagine ourselves acting together to resolve our problems" (Francis, 1998: 475). The logical question to ask would be: what are the "right narratives" that need to be told in the context of Macedonia, in view of the problems arising as a result of the disintegration of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia and the period of transition that followed? The understanding that the insight in the truth, history and memory is not direct presents difficulties to the consensus on the issue of the "right narratives" for a community. The validity of that claim is evident from the tumultuous reactions to the "Skopje 2014" Project, proposed and realized by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia.
Local and foreign urban planners, architects, philosophers, political scientists, cultural workers, artists, ordinary people - they have all commented on the Project. They have all given their own interpretations, views and opinions. A simple quick search of the Web shows that the Project was the main subject of at least a dozen doctoral or masters' theses. Members of the Macedonian public speak about it in forums and chat rooms. Researchers, even those for whom the topic is not part of their narrow scientific interest, make serious efforts to provide arguments for their positions, and institutions invest their resources into opinion polls and surveys. As a result, we could conclude that the reception of the Project in the public moves from an enthusiastic support to summary dismissal. Foreign visitors, on various occasions, as well as tourists react in similar ways: they are either amazed by the grand nature of the Project or are at least bewildered.

We shall try to define the issues that make this so provocative and, by that, attempt to answer the question if the “Skopje 2014” Project contributes to social cohesion or social disintegration. We posit that the process of creation of the strategy of the “Skopje 2014” Project combines the essentialist and constructivist concepts of identity. Our thesis relies on Brian S. Osborne’s concept of invention of state through landscape, monuments and architecture that imagine a given history in order to make it a part of the collective memory. The success of the strategy depends on whether the evoked memory, with all the accompanying processes, shall be accepted by the stakeholders. On the other hand, the latter answers the question if engaged memory contributes to the sustainable development of a community. It’s success can be “measured” by investigating the levels to which the construed memory is accepted and becomes integrated into collective memory. This thesis places equal emphasis on the processes of the invention of identities through memory and the processes of reception.

The project is composed of a large number of sculptures; monuments to famous figures of Macedonian history and culture; buildings - some host museums, some are the offices of government ministries; the old National Theatre was rebuilt on the same spot where it stood before the 1963 catastrophic earthquake; a triumphal arch was built, named “The Macedonia Gate”. Under the auspices of the Project, old facades are being reconstructed, including the seat of the government, and other activities are being implemented that change the very face of Skopje.

II. SPACE-MEMORY-EMOTION: A TRADI IN THE INVENTION OF STATE IDENTITY

Space-Memory-Emotion: a Triad in the Invention of The idea that space and identity are connected is not new. It was Basso (1996:7) who claimed that without words to denote spatial relations, one couldn’t construct the auto-imagological picture and the historical knowledge which, on the other hand, take part in the construction of national identities. Therefore, the term “culturally defined spaces” (Martin 1997), while Julian Rose (Rose 1995: 87-118) discussed the processes that help tie identity to certain practices in culturally defined spaces. Brian S. Osborne (2001), on the other hand, talks about the discovery/invention of a nation through landscape, monuments and architecture, i.e., through the creation of an identity of a certain place. He concludes that the procedures of “world-building”, “place-ma-
king” and “constructing places” is the main tool of historical imagination through several acts of remembrance, making assumptions and speculations” (Osborne, 2001: 5). Those objects/mnemons are related to the characteristics of one space (Halbwachs 1992) and to the lieux de mémoire (Nora 1996) which are “mnemonic devices for national narratives, shared values, and putative hopes for the future (...).” (Osborne, 2001: 4). In that context, Osborne examines the social construct of the space in the (re)imagining and (re)creation of identities, i.e., as “nurturing of a collective memory and social cohesion through the representation of national narratives in monumental forms, the construction and consecration of a symbolic topography, and the performance of identity through commemorative activity” (Osborne, 2001: 5). Those views continue on Zelinsky’s conclusion that “identities can’t be constructed without engagement of symbols and myths” (Zelinsky, 1989: 13). Such processes can be realized only as a form of a “dictate” by those with the power to issue one, i.e., the state authorities. Or, in terms used by Osborne, a form of choreography and orchestration: “National cohesion, in other words, requires a sense of collective awareness and identity that is promoted through a shared sense of historical experience. What we are talking about, therefore, is the choreographing of the power of imagination by locating it in an invented history, and grounding it in an imagined geography. The orchestration of such collective remembering and, if necessary, collective amnesia, constitutes the crucial underpinning of national-state identities” (Osborne, 2001: 8). It is achieved, among other things, with public imagery put in the concrete form of monuments and architecture (Anderson, 1991; Ben-Amos and Weissberg, 1999; Bodnar, 1992; Gillis, 1994; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Hutchinson, 1987; Kammen, 1991; McClintock, 1995; Samuel, 1994 1998; Spillman, 1997; Zelinsky, 1989), as an opportunity to demonstrate the “state-prescribed national solidarity” (Osborne, 2001:9).

We shall use that body of theory to assess the implemented strategies of the “Skopje 2014” Project. In a situation of intensive search for ways to stabilize the identity in an unfavourable political environment, the narratives construed by the elites (political and intellectual) can rely on two, conditionally speaking, opposed concepts:

- The so-called ethnic nationalism, an essentialist concept that views identity and its legitimacy as a process of proving the historical continuity; “the glorious past” and “heroic ancestors” from history, engages the emotions of people that help build the sense of unity and belonging, and

- The so-called state nationalism, a constructivist concept that sees every identity as a construct that activates parts of the memory, based on actual needs.

We believe that the “Skopje 2014” Project applies both concepts simultaneously - the first concept defines the strategy for imagining of narratives, while the second defines the strategy that imposes the imaginary narratives as dominant ones. Clearly, the “Skopje 2014” Project “follows” the second, constructivist concept. It constructs an essentialist story of the eternal struggle of the Macedonian people for emancipation, thus “proving” the legitimacy of the state. That narrative, through the strategy of “embedding an identity into the place through landscape, monuments and architecture” (in this particular case the place is the centre of the capital which, by way of metonymy, is turned into a symbol for the state), is imposed as dominant with the aim to homogenize the state. In other words,
the whole Project performs the function to construct a shared memory of the Macedonian people with which the people will identify themselves.

III. POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE "SKOJPE 2014" PROJECT

Throughout history, the Macedonian state has developed under very unfavourable political circumstances. The Macedonian people stayed under Ottoman rule for the longest period of time, while after the Balkan Wars and World War I, their demands for independence didn’t materialize. Even after the World War II, although a constituent part of Yugoslavia, the Macedonian people felt they weren’t free in decision-making processes. Things get complicated after the fall of Yugoslavia, when Macedonia faced a real challenge of not being able to constitute a state recognized by the international community. That challenge culminated with the so-called name-dispute problem, its main consequence being the veto Greece placed on Macedonia’s entry to NATO and the EU under its constitutional name. On top of everything, Macedonia faces the refusal by Bulgaria to recognize the existence of the Macedonian language and the lack of recognition of independence of Macedonian Orthodox Church - the Archdiocese of Ohrid by Serbia. In 2001, Macedonia faced an armed conflict provoked by Macedonian Albanians. Faced with a blockade and poverty, some Macedonian citizens sought a way out by taking on Bulgarian passports, an act that has further complicated the situation in favour of Bulgarian claims. In such circumstances, the state elites and the ruling party (VMRO-DPMNE), in response to the increasingly vocal demands of the public to overcome the so-called "identity crisis", launched the "Skopje 2014" Project. Its realisation provoked tumultuous reactions and accusations by segments of the Macedonian public opinion and the opposition SDSM party, namely, that the demands to stabilize the identity were transformed by the Government’s Project into a process of a disintegration of the Macedonian identity through the forced changing of history and the memory of the Macedonian people.

IV. CONTROVERSIAL RECEPTION FOR THE "SKOJPE 2014" PROJECT

One result of the noted “two-fold” strategy of the “Skopje 2014” Project was the construction of the narrative that goes: the Macedonian nation is based on its struggle for independence, while the antiquity is the “glorious past” to which many generations of patriots aspired. It creates a “victorious” self-image that should act as a convincing retort to the “identity crisis”. The persuasiveness of this narrative should be achieved through a strategy of the invention of place by embedding it with identity that would be brought about by monuments of famous figures from the past as insight into “true” history and memory, disputed by both internal and external agents. In the place building, the monument has the same function details play in realistic prose. Similar to realistic literature, the details construct the illusion of reality. They are used to “prove” the veracity of what is shown, that is, it stands in place of the absent reality and testifies for the veracity of the story. The monuments are “iconic narratives” that stand in the place of absent figures of historical reality.

Architecture, on the other hand, constructs another story that is in correlation with the previous one. The
choice of style (neoclassicism and baroque) of the buildings along Vardar river aims to present Macedonian culture as an integral part of (Western) European culture, yet with history and culture of its own. If the strategy noted above started from an indisputable fact, that Macedonian soil was a place of changing cultures from prehistory to this day which can’t but leave traces in the culture of the people that live on that very soil today, the strategy used to choose the style relies on the so-called concept of “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and aims to complete the story: not only does Macedonian identity have its own history, but it also has its own culture that is part of the European cultural circle. That strategy was seen as a response to the absurd decision by NATO and EU that the Republic of Macedonia shouldn’t start full membership negotiations.

The simultaneous application of the two concepts in the Project’s strategy collides with the modernist concept that one work (project, in our case), in order to be credible/true, needs to follow the conventions of the genre, a position revised by the arrival of the post-modern which demonstrates preference for hybrids as stylistic orientation. Therefore, the logical assumption is that the Project would create a conflict in the academic community between its members informed by two different concepts of art, and in the general public along the lines of personal convictions on the question related to history and personal taste. All of that warrants an assessment of the success of “Skopje 2014” Project.

One of the most vocal and engaged critics of the Project, Nikos Chausidis, believes that through its “disregard for the existing architectural experience”, the Project continues on the already seen tactics of past conquerors of Macedonia to destroy the cultural heritage they found, who see what was built before them as someone else’s heritage (which “records” someone else’s memory) and needs to be disintegrated (Chausidis, 2013: 19). Chausidis believes that there is a difference, after all: the ideologues of “Skopje 2014” do not destroy. Rather, they apply the strategy of “building in already developed places”, which could be interpreted as a wish to recompose memory. His thesis is: if creators act as an occupation force, then the re-composition is a sign of disintegration and not stabilisation of the Macedonian identity. His conclusion, inter alia, is based on an analysis of a sort of the psychological profile of the proponents (describing them as “cowardly aggressive” with a wish to present the physical inability as a “spiritual power”), which, in his view, leads to a situation in which exaggeration, temporal discontinuity and absurdity are the main characteristics of the Project.

We could say that such a conclusion summarizes all the different objections against the Project. Although quite numerous, such views seem one-sided, reducing the complex interplay between past and present, global and national, memory and oblivion to one-sided conditions. The exaggeration mentioned by Chausidis could be interpreted as an intentional strategy to oppose the real and present threat of negation of Macedonian identity, arising from the idea that Macedonia is an artificial communist creation, without historical legitimacy and, as such, lacking the necessary attributes to constitute a state in its own right. The realisation of the “Skopje 2014” Project needs to establish a quick and “visible” link to dismiss such opinions and, as a result, we have the namerous statues of historical figures considered important in the history of Macedonia. The quantity could be interpreted as a testimony to the rich history and continuity, from antiquity (the “Warrior on a Horse”, the monuments
in front of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, etc.), through the Middle Ages (the monuments to Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Tsar Samoil) and the XIX century, to the near history (Chento, the Bridge of Arts). Viewed like that, the absurdity isn’t in the quantity of the “exhibits”, but rather in the attempt to deny the existence of a country (through the negation of its constituent elements: its name, language, and territory) on the basis of essentialist concepts with real consequences for the present. The absurdity is rather visible in the so-called name-dispute, that is, in the opportunity to dispute the right to self-identification of a whole nation in spite of the fact that no other contemporary nation has any pretentions to the name as a name of its own country.

Furthermore, having in mind the ongoing globalisation and European unification, the very idea to construct a national identity through monuments and monumental architecture seems anachronous. On the other hand, in view of the insistence on national (especially cultural specifics) of “great” and stable nations, we couldn’t really say that now, in the 21st century, national identities are an outdated and insignificant category. Quite to the contrary, it is in the globalisation and unification processes that the European states insist on the specifics of a national culture which, on the other hand, also insists on the essentialist concept and seems to be decisive in the building of a state’s dignity. Having in mind the past experiences in the Republic of Macedonia - the fact that socialist ideology is internationalist by nature and approaches the place as an open space without national symbols and national memory - the task of the persons that want to “fill up” the “open/empty” space with meanings that will reflect both a civic and a national/ethnic concept is exceedingly difficult. The question arises: if the building of a national identity is an anachronous phenomenon in the 21st century because it refers to processes that belong prima-
rily to the 19th century, what options are left for the nations that had no chance to do it "on time", knowing that the issue has great currency now, in the 21st century? Is it possible to condemn the wish for self-identification that would improve the self-confidence of members of a given nation and strengthen the sense of belonging, constructing a memory that, one way or another, invokes the "glorious past”? In view of well-known and prescribed 19th century matrixes, still valid today and brought to the fore by NATO and EU decisions and debates about European identity, the answer to that question can be nothing but negative. To put it simply, if the discourse on uniqueness of national characteristics and uniqueness of cultural identities - based in part on essentialist narratives that constitute an unavoidable bone of content - is so important to relations between states, then the creation of a narrative about the special nature of the Macedonian cultural identity on similar essentialist stories, is not an anachronous one.

Why is that?

Because, in the words of Milan Prodanović, “The negation of the need for continuity of radicalized modern movement and the attempts to exclude, eliminate or minimize the limiting boundaries of tradition were proven ineffective... The situation of shapeless relativism (...) brings to memory a pathology of alienation, anomie, absence of value systems that arise from the absence of identity... Therefore, the shaping of the place with monuments as recognizable visual supports, megaliths of the collective memory support the collection of memories of the past, while there is a clear implicit aim to preserve the memories of the people and events seen as important.” (Prodanovic, http://www.republika.co.rs/470-471/21.html) Therefore, we can’t really condemn the declared aims of the “Skopje 2014” Project, “through creation of symbolism of different historical references and aesthetics”, (Institute of Social and Humanist Sciences, http://www.isshs.edumk/documents/1.-Sk2014-MK.pdf) to bring to the fore those parts of history and
memory that nurture that image of cultural uniqueness. Starting from the realization that there is no such thing as an inherent identity of a location and that material objects built on given location construe certain memories that then serve as spatial coordinates of identity, that is, in Lynch’s words “the people are constructed by the space” (Lynch, 1960: 73) in the processes of interaction between place and experience, the “Skopje 2014” Project should create a picture of the past that Macedonia would want to identify with, i.e., a picture that will be desirable to consume and shall ensure social cohesion, unified collective memory and, therefore, a stable identity. A fine illustration of the fact that those efforts are not far off that target is the reception of the national basketball team in 2011, after it placed 4th in the European Basketball Championship. They didn’t win the tournament or took a medal for that matter, but almost all media called the public to greet the “victors”. The most common were reports that “the basketball players will pass in triumph through the Macedonia Gate (http://daily.mk/makedonija/koshkarite-utre-triumfalno-kje-pominat-
-niz-portata-makedonija – accessed on November 29, 2014), which met with great and mass response and will likely enter the memory of the Macedonian state. Osborne says that it happens because “[h]umans create ‘place images’ that become central to daily life and social practice. The material spaces and their representations are always ideological statements and constitute what Schein calls a ‘materialized discourse’” (Schein, 1997: 28).

In other words, every change (in our case, the period of transition) causes a recomposition of the past which, on the other hand, can materialize in monuments and architecture that due to its emotional engagement (as in the case of reception of basketball players) perform the fastest transfer of a given narrative about the past to the current needs of the present time. What will be chosen from the past and what shape the story about the past will take always depends on the aims and goals of the given ideology, and it is the political elite that has the power to materialize that story. The “Skopje 2014” Project encourages the identification with the state through emphasis on historical continuity. It is done through calling on the members of the community to “recognize one another as being members of a larger group sharing a common historical meta-narrative” (Osborne, 2001:9). So, a common memory and identity should be created for the future generations, based on the victorious dynasty of Alexander of Macedon.

The goal of such public spectacles referring, on the one hand, to the past and, on the other, tying that past to the present, through a current sports event, is to motivate the members of the community to see themselves as “winners” in continuity, from the military victories of Alexander of Macedon in the ancient past to contemporary sport victories and by that to construct a
new collective memory which will be dominantly marked by victory, not by defeat. The mass turnout clearly demonstrates the success of the strategy. Thus, the essentialist narrative is transformed into a constructivist strategy, having in mind that the favoured memory is not an "objectively recorded past, but a reconstruction in present day context and is never independent of the government's ideas and contemplations" (Halbwachs, 1992: 40). That establishes, in Gillis’s words, the recognition of “one another as being members of a larger group sharing a common historical metanarrative” staged by the “bureaucracy of memory” which determines what shall be remembered and what shall be forgotten and advocates the elite over popular memory” (Gillis, 1994: 3-6).

The other side of the medal says that is not the whole story. The Institute of Policy Research and Good Governance in Project Skopje 2014 (PE) Construction of Identity Through Monuments (Institute of Policy Research and Good Governance, 2012), identifies four key points of disagreement with the Project which are, by extension, points of social disintegration:

- Disagreements over the confrontations provoked inside the Macedonian nation itself, between the two leading government and opposition parties, with the opposition objecting to high corruption and the non-aesthetic solutions.
- Disagreements over the confrontations provoked inside the Macedonian nation caused by the attempt to redefine its identity: From Slavic to an identity rooted in antiquity and from a history that records only certain "clear" personalities and figures in relation to their views on the "Macedonian question", to history that "involves" other figures that held "dubious" positions on that same quest.

The question is, why does such reactions emerge?

Popular memory is composed of diverse memories which, according to Bodnar, threaten the efforts to universalize memory and identity (Bodnar, 1994: 75). For our thesis, there is another important conclusion that is a resultant of the one noted above. Popular memory is also a constructed memory and its diversity is based, among other things, to the multitude of constructed memories from previous regimes. Therefore, any attempt to recreate certain memory and a corresponding identity produces a clash of forces of different memories, with each one of them fighting for a dominant position.

These processes: the wish to establish a universal discourse and diversity of popular memory redefine the production of collective memories. While the establishment of a universal memory is a utopia, the stabilization of a national identity still relies on the levels of acceptance of public perceptions. That is, regardless of the extent of success of strategies that aim to present a nation-state as a homogeneous unity, the nation-state is always polysemic (Jensen, 1990; Rodman, 1992). Humans are not just passive agents in the processes of
the imposition of a dominant discourse on memory, therefore, the Project shall have different meanings for the different recipients and, by extension, shall receive different interpretations. As Hall claims (Hall, 1980: 134 and later), there are several possible readings, the preferred reading being the one that has the Project in positive regard, accepts its ideas and, in essence, is representative of the current distribution of power. Judging from the turnout of citizens to participate in public manifestations and events, the Project enjoys a wide support.

Of greater interest to us is the negotiated reading, situated in the dominant ideology but applied locally or individually in order to adapt it to a specific situation, which can be identified in the reactions of Albanians in Macedonia. The outcome is expected: the project integrates “symbols of other ethnic communities” (Frazer, 1996: 91) as a result of negotiations to correspond to the multiethnic reality in Macedonia. Therefore, the national project “Skopje 2014” could be seen as a “context in which they (people from different ethnic communities) can cherish their national identity”. (Kymlicka, Opalski, 2001: 221).

The “opposite reading” shall be identified in the positions of the Project’s critics (representatives of neighbouring countries, the opposition parties, some representatives of the academic community informed by the concept of the modernity, etc.). Here, we shall focus on those opposite readings related to the strategic goal of Macedonia to become a full member of NATO and EU. Some Macedonians and some members of the other ethnic communities in Macedonia see the Project as an obstacle to the achievement of required good neighbourly relations, creating a line of division among Macedonian citizens. Those “for” say that without national dignity (which implies construction of a “victorious” memory and memory of the glorious, Biblical name) the membership in the European Union and NATO can’t be on equal ground. Those “against” say that if Macedonia doesn’t join EU and NATO, it’s not just the name, it may lose the state, too. Adding the remark that the “orientation towards the past, nurturing a cult of ancestors, male heroism and clan mentality” are the elements of the Project which indicate that this was not the appropriate model chosen to create memory and identity.

What do the numbers say?

The results of public opinion surveys conducted by Brima Galup and the "Dimitrija Čupovski" Institute show that 45.9% of the polled citizens don’t support the project, while 25.4% support it. We should also bear to mind the survey conducted in 2013 by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities Skopje, implemented under the auspices of the Project Skopje 2014 and its Effects on Skopje’s Citizens Perceptions of Macedonian Identity, which concludes that there is unambiguous difference between the common people’s perception of the “true Macedonian identity” and the one promoted by the State. The conclusion was made on “basis of comparison of the State’s narrative and the narrative of the citizens of Skopje about Macedonian identity, with the aim to find if the former corresponded to the latter.

The findings of such surveys contradict the pictures created in manifestations with evident mass turnout. Perhaps the answer to that “contradiction” is found in the different starting points of those who assess it. On the one hand, a significant portion of the criticism directed at the Project are based on the view the it exhibits a bad aesthetics, that it deforms the city, that it is a bad plagiarism, kitsch, etc. On the other hand, it is
assessed from the point of view of “politics of dead bodies (which) changes the temporal nature of personality which it takes to the kingdom of timeless sanctity, like an icon” (Verdery, 1999: 5). Many authors note, however, that monuments and their tying to commemorations are best contemplated as communication tools, not as aesthetic representations. As such, they emphasize the power of “memory processing”. As mnemonic objects, monuments always take part in the creation of social relations. Once defined social relations, together with the order and distribution of power, as Gramsci says, are not set in stone and are subject of constant negotiations. The negotiations often include resistance to the dominant systems of power. That is why they are contested.

Any production, including the specific production of the “Skopje 2014” Project, needs to accommodate the fact that “consumers” are not a culturally undefined amorphous mass and that influence is never an one-way process. The very act of consumption modifies the product in a certain way, therefore, the success of the Project in achieving its aims will depend on whether and to what extent the “consumers” enjoy the product (Fiske). Clearly, the ideologue of the Project and the Government of the Republic of Macedonia are well-informed about that and the Project is realized as a process related to the demands of the “audiences”, i.e., the major part of the citizens of Macedonia. We believe that the reasons for the support the project enjoys among the majority of citizens lies not in how grand it is, or the idea of continuity, the idea of “victory”, its aesthetics, etc., but in the strategy based on a well-thought out balance between “top down” and “base up” policies that create satisfaction in both the act of reception and the act of auto-imaging perception.
V. CONCLUSION

All of the above leads to a conclusion that history, memory and identity are constantly renegotiated. Of all the available strategies, the “Skopje 2014” Project chose a hybrid strategy which, on the one hand, relies on personification of national elements in a symbolic space with the aim to ensure that the people of one community will identify with a specific history and geography, based on the sense of satisfaction. It is done through a certain “politics of memory” that implies extraction of all memories that contribute to the logical construction of the story and simultaneous construction of memory for the future generations. Thus, judging from its reception, the project implements a successful strategy positioned in the new non-essentialist concepts of identity and memory. The implementation of such strategies implies, in the ideal situation, a unification of the really fragmented Macedonian society through the constructed national metanarratives. However, because ideal situations are impossible in reality, the analysis of the reactions to the “Skopje 2014” Project indicates that, in general, it does enjoy the support of a great majority of the citizens. Through a procedure of “invention of memory”, it succeeds in the intent to reconstruct the Macedonian identity, usually imagined as unfairly marginalized, on the basis of an essentialist narrative for Macedonian citizens aimed to ensure places of self-identification based on satisfaction. We believe that it is the satisfaction with that identification that turned the Project into a success story. It remains to be seen whether it will prove a factor of social inclusion, in view of different ideological and theoretical premises and the multiethnic nature of Macedonia. The future is undefined and unpredictable and can be dominated by other strategies that could be seen as successful. As Dr. Elizabeta Kancheska-Milevska, the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia says, only time will show if the identifications produced by “Skopje 2014” Project will remain valid in the future. That is so because, as Osborne says “[h]umans create “place-images” that become central to daily life and social practice. Material places and their representations are always ideological (...) It follows, therefore, that as society evolves and changes, places themselves change as they become dynamic and reflexive sites of innovation” (Osborne, 2001: 5).

ENDNOTES

[1] Macedonians usually use the verb “to acquire” to denote the action of acquisition of a Bulgarian passport, in difference to the use of the verb “to get”, which is commonly used to denote the acquisition of a Macedonian passport. That illustrates the attitudes towards the passport as a document that expresses belonging. Macedonian citizens do not seek or wish to have a Bulgarian passport, they acquire it, a linguistic distinction the testifies for the fact that the decision is forced by economic, not identity based reasons.


[3] The poll conducted by Brima Galup in 2012 asked 1,156 citizens to answer the question: “Some things cause different emotions when you hear about the realisation of the “Skopje 2014” Project?” The results were as follows: 42.7% of the polled had very negative opinion of the project, with another 15.1% having a somewhat negative opinion, i.e. 57.8% of the polled have negative opinions about “Skopje 2014”. On the other side we have 10.9% of the polled with very positive opinions and 15.5% with somewhat positive opinion of the project, or a total of 26.4% of the polled citizens that gave a positive opinion of
The Project "Skopje 2014"...

the project. 15.8% of the citizens were indifferent (having neither positive nor negative opinion of the project).

[4] The poll commissioned by the 'Dimitrija Čupovski' Institute and conducted by Ipsos Strategic Puls agency on a sample or 2000 citizens gave the following results: asked "To what extent you support or don't support the Skopje 2014 Project", 24.4% of the polled said they fully support the project, and 39.2% said they "somewhat" support the project. 34% of the polled gave negative answers that they don't support the project. Among ethnic Macedonian, 28% gave positive answers - 28% support it fully and 42% support it partially, while 27% gave negative answers.

[5] Asked "To what extent you personally like the Baroque style of the buildings of the Skopje 2014 Project?", 25% didn't like the style at all while 21% said they liked it a lot. 49% of the polled said they liked the monument and the fountain "Warrior on a Horse", with 22% saying they didn't like it.

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