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Iris Adriana Verschuren

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Digging in Kitsch Depths

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Martin Zerlang, Henrik Reeh

Second Reader

Bas van Heur

Abstract

This research concerns itself with forms of kitsch in two urban development projects. These projects in Skopje, Macedonia and Zaandam, The Netherlands, are discussed in their specific contexts and then analysed along a framework based on themes and topics related to the cultural category of kitsch. This category deals with both stylistic and aesthetic characteristics, but also focuses on processes outside of the object. Thus it enables to think of kitsch as a label that can just as well be applied to politics, policies or therefore urban development projects apart from just cultural objects. Furthermore linking kitsch with the ideologies and narratives of the UDPs shows how these are expressed in the actual physical form. In the end it is about the question what labeling these projects kitsch means, but also in what ways the label is used or applied and what kind of responses this evokes thus answering 'in what ways can kitsch be related to the contemporary urban development projects *Skopje 2014* and *Inverdan*?' Although the cities and projects are incredibly different in context and the resulting style, there are still similarities in the way that kitsch is used and how this relates to a continuing global pressure to compete in neoliberal logics.

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Introduction

To start my thesis is to start with images rather than with any words. The simple act of seeing these projects in person, but even on pictures, evoked such a strong reaction and simple statement in my head that cannot be recreated without any visual material. Even though these two cities have such diverging histories, urban landscapes, contexts and new styles, they still evoked a very similar response from me. First seeing these projects in photographs and later in real life or the other way around made me wonder, smile, nod and then immediately define them as kitsch. *Inverdan* and *Skopje 2014* were added to my list of things I considered kitsch: cheap trinkets found in souvenir shops, replicas of Monet painting on mugs or t-shirts, garden gnomes in my great aunts garden, and so on.

Photographs from my own visits and observations of the case studies. Each picture was taken on the first initial experience of the projects and their architecture. Photos by author.

The urban projects are however slightly out of place in this list full of tiny objects and cheap trinkets. These projects that were planned and realised involved price tags that are a lot bigger than those price tags on your favourite souvenirs. Moreover the buildings and statues are not used to decorate a personal living room, but are part of the public space of an entire city. The projects are subject to a lot more taste judgements then a garden gnome in your backyard that you might fight over with your partner. Especially Skopje's recent development project shows that the urban space as a setting for kitsch involves a lot more tastes and judgements and can spark many conflicts.

I was surely not the first to think of these projects as kitsch, nor to see the conflict it could create. With starting some research I found out that Skopje had been dubbed the new capital of kitsch by The Guardian and various others and Zaandam had been sniggered at by critics because of its kitsch references to the regional architecture (Crevar, 2016; Gillet, 2015; Glancey, 2010; De Lange, 2010). However even though they discuss the projects from different perspectives and spend time on the problematics, it was barely related to an exploration of the concept of kitsch. Real reflection on these judgements, they were mostly just to indicate the lack of aesthetic value, were not really there. Kitsch was used just as easily to describe these projects like you would use it to describe the cat pictures on your grandmother's wall. The use of the concept of kitsch was very limited for describing these projects and their responses.

For a concept of kitsch is not only applicable to small objects that are simply cheap or things part of mass production schemes. The concept has already been argued to be useful to more than small porcelain figurines, especially when keeping places like Las Vegas in mind or the art of Jeff Koons that blurs boundaries between the high and the low arts. But even outside of actual cultural objects such as art and architecture the kitsch label has been used to describe political campaigns, policies and more, straying perhaps from what was originally thought of as kitsch (Lugg, 1999; Edelman, 1995; Kjellman-Chapin, 2010). With it becoming a bit of a chameleon, something that could label almost anything, there is also of course the risk of losing meaning. However rather than arguing for this, the richness of the concept I think lies in its multiplicity of meanings and for sure also in the new conceptions. Thus the focus of my research lies partially in what Kjellman-Chapin (2012) deems necessary:

> It is time to pry open and look again at the ideologies that inform and form the category of kitsch, to interrogate how that taxon makes meaningful – and meaning for – a category of objects and practices, and to rethink what it means to label something kitsch (38).

The main question will be thus be to think of this kitsch label and *'In what ways kitsch can be related to the contemporary urban projects Skopje 2014 and Inverdan?'*

I find it important to reflect on this label and by whom it is applied or in what ways it might be (mis)used and, perhaps very importantly, how it is criticised. The research question thus shows both my focus on kitsch, as a category that fits in both object and processes, but also the contemporaneity of the projects. This means to delve both in the contextual specificity of the cities and their projects as their historical backgrounds are incredibly important, but to also explore the frame that both cases deal with in the form of a dominant international neoliberal approach and the globalisation that is at play.

In the end I would think the concept of kitsch will help understand the urban projects their ideologies and approaches to revitalising these cities through their specific aesthetic expressions. As divergent these cases seem at first hand, I think in comparison they can also give more of an understanding of the ways that the physical urban form expresses the processes and ideologies that steer urban projects. Rather than focusing entirely on the actors, the investments or the policies, I want to stick close to the materiality of the cases. After all, the style of *Inverdan* and *Skopje 2014* evoke the immediate responses of wonder, laughter or confusion even before the ideologies and their conflicts behind the facades become clear.

Literature Review

| Kitsch

An understanding of the concept of kitsch is of course essential to answer the questions posed before. This is already a tricky thing in itself. Kitsch, even though everyone seems to know exactly what you are talking about when you mention this – based on personal experience when explaining my thesis topic – cannot easily be defined. Matei Calinescu (1987) has said himself: 'like art itself, of which it is both imitation and negation, kitsch cannot be defined from a single vantage point' (232). Thus I would like to discuss it from different time periods, contexts and vantage points. However the goal is also to provide a working definition with specific themes and characteristics of kitsch that I have used in my research. The following works as a historical overview but also as a basis for the working definition that I will establish later.

Also I will not discuss kitsch merely as a *style* or a historical *concept*. Much more so I would like to think of kitsch as a *cultural category* much like Jean Baudrillard (1998) did when discussing kitsch in relation to the consumer society. For Baudrillard (1998) this means taking into account the logistics of the object with regards to its symbolism, but also the appearance of it and how mass production and accumulation relate to the kitsch object. To consider kitsch as a cultural category in my case means being able to not only see what objects can fit in here or are put in there by certain people, but also to see the processes that surround it. Kitsch as a cultural category can go beyond stylistic characteristics as it then also deals with the workings of class inherent to it and the comfort culture that surrounds it. These allow for whole other things to be thought of as kitsch. One does not only have to think of porcelain figurines but can include kitsch-politics too. Moreover it allows for delving not only into analyses of the objects but also in the way they have been produced and consumed.

Kitsch Origins

'Kitsch' is a word that finds its origins in the German language. As a verb it is known to indicate a process of making something 'cheap' or to collect rubbish from the street (Binkley, 2000; Calinescu, 1987; Menninghaus, 2009; Kulka, 1996). This is related to the context of Munich art markets dating back to the 1860s and 1870s where kitsch was used to describe sketches – mispronounced by Germans as something like 'kitsch' – or marketable pictures (Calinescu, 1987; Kulka, 1996). Calinescu (1987) derives three characteristics from this etymological origin of kitsch: kitsch deals with things that can be sketchy, it is affordable or even cheap and it could just as well be seen as junk (235). On the Munich art market kitsch was thus a specific object and it created a specific conception of kitsch as 'an aesthetically impoverished object of shoddy production meant more to identify the consumer with a newly acquired (and badly managed) class status than to invoke a genuine aesthetic response' (Binkley, 2000: 137). This refers to kitsch as more of a process of the nouveaux riches buying themselves into a status rather than it just being properties of a certain object (Binkley, 2000).

Kitsch and the Romantic Period

Conceived on the Munich markets kitsch finds more general use in the Romantic period. Hermann Broch (1950) even writes in his 'Notes on the Problem of Kitsch' how Romanticism could be considered the mother of kitsch where it sometimes shows so many similarities it is hard to tell them apart. On the one hand this close link between romanticism and kitsch has to do with the already aforementioned rise of the new class of bourgeoisie or of a new middle

class. In very simple terms kitsch was conceived as *the* expression of middle class taste (Calinescu, 1987: 247). Not to mention that Romanticism in Calinescu's (1987) perspective was the first popular artistic movement when democratic elements were introduced not just in society but also more specifically related to thoughts on taste and art. The role of aesthetic itself changes as now art can be there merely for an aesthetic purpose (Harvey, 1989; Olaluiaga, 2002). Moreover the role of aesthetics leaves its confinement within art and is from then on more and more used in other cultural practices or in politics (Harvey, 1989).

Rather than just situating kitsch within the social and class context, Broch (1950) also refers to the 'spiritual attitude' of Romanticism which was suitable for kitsch to arise (53). Within a context in which an escape from reality is wanted and an occupation with beauty captured in art takes over, kitsch thrives. Kitsch shares this pre-occupation with the beautiful according to Broch (1950) as 'the essence of kitsch is the confusion of the ethical category with the aesthetic category; a 'beautiful' work, not a 'good' one, is the aim; the important thing is an effect of beauty' (71). To achieve this beauty affect it does not reach into the jar of originality, but rather uses the 'tried and tested', the 'what has already been' and 'prefabricated expressions' that often result in clichés (Broch, 1950: 71 – 72). Imitation of art or of what is beautiful here is a key concept for understanding kitsch and of course the cliché resonates with how kitsch is used nowadays.

Kitsch and Modernity

With kitsch coming into use around the 18th and 19th century like this, Calinescu (1987) reflects on the term as one lacking historical depth. Or perhaps worded differently: as a particularly modern concept. He furthermore deals extensively with the role kitsch played in modernity or how it was influenced by the modernists and the times. He sees kitsch as 'one of the most typical products of modernity' but states the importance of discussing the concept along with modernity, avant-garde and decadence because of it being able to show the conflict between the two modernities: caricatures of them being the 'stage' against which the Western historical narrative is set and being an aesthetic concept (Calinescu, 1987: 7; 41).

This is perhaps also very well captured in Clement Greenberg's (1965; 1939) perspective on the discussion of the avant-garde and kitsch. He does not hide that from his perspective the avant-garde expressions are far superior to those of kitsch. The two are however intricately linked in a relationship that goes beyond the one simply being better than the other. For one both cultural phenomena appeared around the same time, according to Greenberg, in the context of an industrial society (Greenberg, 1965; 1939). He sees kitsch as a direct product of the industrial revolution that 'urbanized the masses of Western Europe and America and established what is called universal literacy' (Greenberg, 1965; 1939: 39). At this point then the process already starting during the Romantic period where art is being democratised and enters other classes, the Modern period reaches a setting where everyone has access to it. This obviously leads to the mass culture and consumption of the following postmodern period.

Kitsch then for Greenberg (1965; 1939) is a mass consumption product that has nothing to do with the authenticity and autonomy that avant-garde art tries to achieve. More importantly there is almost no effort put into kitsch, not by its creator and not by its consumer: 'Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money – not even their time' (Greenberg, 1965; 1939: 40). It is according to him a deceptive and imitative and a

mechanical cultural phenomenon (Greenberg, 1965; 1939: 41). Kitsch is for the masses, avant-garde for the few is what resultantly is presented in Greenberg's essay.

Another notion related to the times of the modern as well as to kitsch is the new ideas surrounding authenticity and uniqueness (Olalquiaga, 2002; Baudrillard, 1998). With the industrial revolution and its new possibilities, reproduction and seriality changed perceptions of authenticity. Walter Benjamin of course wrote extensively on the influence of this new aspect of the times on art (Benjamin, 1936; 2008). Where the romantic period was concerned with art or objects trying to imitate beauty the modern period is preoccupied with notions of authenticity as modernity has allowed for reproduction and copying to be widely available and easy to achieve. For Benjamin this often resulted in the lack or the diminishing of the aura of the work of art (1936; 2008). With regards to kitsch the easy reproducibility of these objects makes them cheaper, available to everyone and according to some fake or false as they claim to be more than just a copy and search just for effects (Broch, 1933; Broch, 1950).

Kitsch and Postmodernity

Within postmodernity's new conceptions of art and the advocating of blurring the low and high culture binary it was possible to undermine and lay bare the hierarchies of taste and class linked to notions of kitsch. The 'elitism' that defined kitsch as bad taste or as non-art and so on can be exposed within this framework (Atkinson, 2007; Sturken, 2007). It however also meant that 'the role and varieties of kitsch have grown infinitely more complex' within the postmodern economy (Kjellman-Chapin, 2010: 32). Calinescu's (1987) comment on how dealing with kitsch means dealing with 'with one of the most bewildering and elusive categories of modern aesthetics' seems even more accurate with kitsch truly entering the stage of art and postmodernism (262). Some thus argue that once kitsch breaks with the high and low culture binary its traditional relation between class and taste no longer seems to fit (Binkley, 2000; Kjellman-Chapin, 2010). A rethinking of class and taste in relation to kitsch is necessary in contemporary conceptions of the term.

The critiques of kitsch that thus were used in the modern period in relation to the mass culture are not adequate to describe the concept in a postmodernist context. As Sturken (2009) discusses 'the challenge to understanding how kitsch operates today is to see the range of responses that it produces, to consider how it can encourage' both non-critical sentimentalities and ironic responses as well as an in depth conversation with history that delves both into feelings of sentiment and of irony (26). The ironic interpretation of kitsch is however dubious as some, like Tomas Kulka (1996) but also Susan Sontag (1964), then would no longer define the object as kitsch once irony intervenes. With self-reflectiveness or self-awareness involved it is more easily typified as parody, pastiche or camp.

These different strategies or approaches refer to previously created material or objects, but just use various relationships with their quoted materials. Postmodernism is however the moment that certain new relationships become the focus, also often in its critiques. Frederic Jameson (1984) describes postmodernism's tendency for historicism as a cannibalizing of 'all the styles of the past' (66). Kulka (1996) in his definition of kitsch uses a similarly negative consumption word and describes it as a parasite on its referents. That this somehow fits within the idea of consumption seems no coincidence as postmodernism and postmodernity are – there it is again – so consumed by the possibilities, limitations and issues of mass consumerism.

Kitsch and (Postmodern) Urbanism

Although kitsch as discussed above does not necessarily specify what art forms or what kind of objects it can be it is most often thought of in the form of the visual arts. However urban planning and architecture have not been exempted from discussions of kitsch in the past. Hermann Broch (1950) described Schinkel's Berlin as kitsch and Walter Benjamin thought Haussmann's project in Paris could only lead to kitsch (as cited in Menninghaus, 2009). Not to mention that perhaps the iconic example of postmodern architecture and planning has just as often been stamped kitsch and has had many an academic write on it. It was Patrice Noviant (1978) who used the word 'kitsch-city' with regards to postmodernist urban planning. Nan Ellin quotes Noviant in the following:

> The invention of tradition and the generation of hyperreal environments often offer an antidote to modernism's insularity, but they can also devolve into bad taste, or kitsch, in their sentimental references to something else. While these recent urban designers are no longer seeking to destroy the city as were the modernists, Patrice Noviant reports, their objective is still not 'the real city' but what 'one might call the kitsch-city, by which is understood the false city, more beautiful than real.'
>
> (Ellin, 1996: 144).

What kitsch in urban planning and architecture thus seems to create are surreal landscapes with eclectic architecture, focused on immediate satisfaction, focused on the spectacle and entertainment and so on. This hardly seems like a style that can just be used anywhere, let alone for prominent city centres. What this should also demonstrate is that kitsch is not only applicable to the arts or maybe more correct the non-arts. It has long surpassed being this very straightforward Munich art market object.

Kitsch as More than Objects

When thinking of examples of kitsch people will perhaps immediately think of the small objects that they have sitting on their shelves or the painting hanging on their aunt's walls. Some of these examples have indeed passed by, but understanding kitsch involves a broader range of objects, things and processes. This also goes beyond a conception of kitsch as an aesthetic style that could be analyzed in the architecture of certain buildings or in the form of statues spread around town. It allows for theories that have thought of political kitsch or kitsch as public policy or just kitsch as a cultural phenomenon and process to be of significance as well. Kjellman-Chapin's (2010) prediction that is then time to pry open the concept of kitsch also involves opening it up in the sense of making it applicable, relatable or usable for processes and phenomena perhaps previously and conventionally not thought of when mentioning kitsch. The label kitsch is not only in the form of a cheap price on that porcelain figurine, but also on that million euro project. This is where I would like to jump into the discourse of kitsch. Without dismissing its historical context but also by realising the opportunities of a more contemporary and flexible concept, I want to reflect on what the kitsch-label means in relation to specific urban projects.

| Urban Development Projects

Perhaps similar to kitsch it is hard to define a specific definition of urban development projects of UDPS. For one the name is already not something that is necessarily fixed as in urban planning these development strategies get all kinds of different names and terms. Thus there is urban renewal or urban revitalisation, urban redevelopment or simply urban development that all aim at renewing areas in cities but have slightly different nuances. An act in the 50s in the United States asked for a change from urban renewal to urban redevelopment to show a changed perspective on the practice that now was more comprehensive and considered keeping structures as well, rather than completely renewing areas in the city (Weber, 2002). Thus the name itself, and the language and logic used in the projects, are carefully structured.

This is also apparent when looking into the development of such policies and strategies in certain contexts. The way that the concepts of blight and obsolescence have been used in the American cities is exemplary for this. Blight for example was used to justify the complete destruction and then redevelopment of certain – mostly poor, non-white – areas by saying that they had deteriorated physically and should no longer be in use or would only cause further deterioration (Weber, 2002; Fainstein & Fainstein, 2012). Obsolescence works as a construct to dismiss areas that innovation has left behind, areas that have no value (Weber, 2002). The narratives are mostly specific to the period and the region that they work within. Thus European examples stray from ones in the United States and also within Europe groups can be made. However in these cases the logic, the narrative or the discourse are constructs.

The Northern European model with the Netherlands as one of the case study countries has had steady welfare influence and construction of social housing, but like the rest of Europe the Dutch case was also concerned with 'enhancing economic advantage within the competitive global economic marketplace' (Fainstein & Fainstein, 2012). This marks that there are general processes that influence on bigger scales how cities are formed and in which ways urban development projects are given form or used. The way that capitalism and in the current situation neoliberalism dominate the discourses of urban planning is visible throughout the changing approaches to urban development projects.

As neoliberalism I understand the dominant perspective that focuses on private property, individualistic tendencies and the promotion of free market and free trade with a limited, but definitely necessary, presence of the state (Harvey, 2006). As a complex system and ideology I want to merely focus on its relation with the urban and more specifically urban development projects rather than discussing it in its entirety. Realised in urban space then and not as ideology, the 'actually existing neoliberalism' takes different forms in each context (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). The project then are embedded 'insofar as they have been produced within national, regional, and local contexts defined by the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and political struggles' (Brenner & Theodore, 2002: 351).

Logics are created that steer cities and governments as urban projects are presented as providing opportunities for economic changes, providing jobs and having the ability to change the position of a city in the urban division of labour for the better (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). The growth, that every city is believed to need to strive for, can be helped through using urban renewal as a tool that is now 'a necessary precondition for economic regeneration'

(Swyngedouw et al., 2002: 200). Often, then, the urban development project turns into an instrument to help make the urban space accommodate for market-driven practices, certain consumption patterns and for further reinforcing of the neoliberal dominance (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). The actual projects are then material expressions of the 'developmental logic that views megaprojects and place marketing as means for generating future growth and for waging a competitive struggle to attract investment capital' (Swyngedouw et al., 2002: 199). Thus it seems quite logical to invest time in analysing the actual styles and how this can be related to this logic, or the discourse that is used in the policies and project plans.

Characterising Contemporary Urban Development Projects

Against this background of capitalistic ideologies that guide many urban development projects there are some characteristics that seem to be recurring in different cities and countries. These either have to do with the actors involved or the intentions from the city and the way that they portray their ideas. The following themes and processes are important to keep in mind when discussing the cases used in this research.

Institutional thickness is one of the concepts used to describe the way that many actors get involved in projects, not only from the state but also from the private market (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). It is often portrayed as something encouraging transparency through the working together of state and civil society (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). However the private actors in their roles do not have the accountability the state would have and makes the processes vague and less prone to criticism and discussion (Ibid.). Moreover it results in the 'shift from a system of representative urban government to one of stakeholder urban governance' (Swyngedouw et al., 2002: 214). Meanwhile the involvement of these private actors is said to add transparency as state and civil society work together (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). Still these private companies do not have the same accountability as the chosen representatives do and create situations that are a lot vaguer, thus actually making urban development project non transparent (Swyngedouw et al., 2002).

After shortly discussing the different words used for urban development projects, we could also discuss the change from perspectives more focused on 'planning' to a take-over of 'projects' in the cities. The 'project' as a newer alternative is 'essentially fragmented' and 'this form of intervention goes hand in hand with an eclectic planning style where attention to design, detail, morphology, and aesthetics is paramount' (Swyngedouw et al., 2002: 215). Like a pars pro toto principle these projects are then supposed to represent the whole city consequently. Moreover this relates as well to one of the strategies of linking urban regeneration to the areas surrounding it as the regional level would benefit from renewal and increased international relations too (Swyngedouw, 2006). It is never just about these specific areas in the cities but it always relates to grander schemes within and outside the cities or even to national, international and global scales.

City branding or place-marketing seems like one of the obvious ways of dealing with this new need for reframing cities aesthetically and in relation to the global competitors (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). To frame the new ideas and plans for restructuring cities and repositioning those within the global competition new discourses are introduced. Already since the 1980s 'the narrative of entrepreneurialism has underpinned city management practices' as 'local governments attempt to project modern self-images and embrace innovative tactics to remake old spaces in the face of global competition' (Weber, 2002: 184). This also clearly relates to the earlier mentioned changing relationships and the way that urban development projects become part of branding strategies. After all these new ways of presenting the city organisation and further planning are focused 'on the need for

revitalization, reinvestment, and rejuvenation in major metropolitan areas' (Brenner & Theodore, 2002: 372).

Comparing Urban Development Projects

When introducing the case studies I will discuss how the specific urban development contexts have developed in both the Netherlands and Macedonia shortly. This will of course show how different the approaches are in both countries and how this has influenced the development projects that are central in this research as well. The Netherlands knows an extensive and detailed urban planning history and has had many urban development projects through the decades, Macedonia as a new and not particularly rich state does not have that experience. Obviously the Macedonian case was dominated by at first the Yugoslavic and of course afterwards the post-socialist contexts. Thus both cases cannot just be discussed as if they completely comply with the aforementioned characteristics. However many of the aspects overlap which I will show in the part to come. In conclusion I want to end with a quote from the Fainstein (2012) article that talks about the changing urban redevelopment strategies as it demonstrates that both differences and comparisons are of importance:

> Even while each metropolitan area and neighbourhood present a set of distinctive characteristics and practices […] broad ideological currents, transnational economic institutional practices, and widely adopted policy models impose a certain uniformity everywhere. The set of stages through which most redevelopment programs have concurrently passed reflects these global pressures, at the same time as local politics and specific outcomes differ. (17)

Case Studies

| Introducing the Cities

Skopje

Before Macedonia becoming an independent state in 1991, Skopje as a city and the surrounding regions have switched kingdoms and empires and republics frequently in the past 200 or so years. Being part of bigger territories Skopje never had the position it has today as a capital city of the small nation, rather it shared its position as a quite big and flourishing city with other places in the Ottoman Empire, the Serbian Kingdom, the Kingdom- or the Republic of Yugoslavia (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011). The occupations, invasions, destructions and constructions have caused the population, size and influence of the city to fluctuate (Ibid.). Since the 20th century, however, it has known a steady growth resulting in a current population of around 536.000 people (UN Data).

The transformations the city went through in its history are not easy to find back in the physical environment of Skopje. Many of the regime changes meant eliminating reminders of the former governing power. Not to mention that a massive earthquake destroyed 80 % of the city in 1963. It was a crucial moment for Skopje's built infrastructure as the disaster attracted international attention which resulted in an extensive plan to rebuild Skopje. Skopje – then still capital of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia within Yugoslavia – in a Cold War context that was at a height of tensions became a setting for the United Nation's attempt at proving the strength of international relations (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011). An international competition was set out and applied to by architects from all over the world. The team of well-known Japanese architect Kenzo Tange won with the plan to create an 'Open City', an ideal perhaps fitting for that time when the world was very much divided.

The Open City

Tange's Skopje City Center Master Plan consisted of mega structures that were symbolic in their naming and way that they would function in the city. A 'city wall' consisting of housing was supposed to encapsulate the centre and a 'city gate' full of businesses, commercial spaces and so on was supposed to function as the entrance to the city (Krstevski, 2006). The city was modelled along new ideas of the Fordist city, on new technologies and more mobility (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011). The internationalist tone of the architecture resulted in a brutalist and in some places even futuristic appearance of the rebuilding of Skopje. Apart from bridging these new technologies and modern sensibilities with the human scale and society, it was also important in actually bridging the river area that had always functioned as a divisive factor in the city (Krstevski, 2006). This Vardar river was supposed to be developed on both sides equally in the original plan. The spaces right on the North and West bank were to transform in a new centre and convergence point for the city, rather than keeping its dividing character (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011).

The ideal of Skopje as an Open City was never realised in its entirety. The ambitious plans Tange had thought off seemed to have underestimated the reality of Skopje. Perhaps there was not enough money to implement the whole plan in the beginning and consequently people lost interest, but more likely it seems that the social structures and conflicts in the city did not comply with the aimed at unification (Krstevski, 2006; Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011). The parts of the project that were realised did give Skopje a specific urban structure and look which is typified by its fragmentariness (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011). Not to mention that most of the buildings constructed over the long period were on the Southern side of the

Vardar river and thus further neglected the Northern part. This reinforced, rather than unified, the already existing segregation of a predominantly Albanian ethnic group above the Vardar river and a mostly ethnic Macedonian population below it (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011).

Ethnic Tensions Expressed

The underlying ethnic tensions that are reflected in the spatial composition of the city have been there for a long time. At the moment of the last census Skopje had a majority (two thirds) of ethnic Macedonians, followed by 20 per cent of the residents having an Albanian ethnicity, a further 5 per cent are Roma and then around 9 per cent have other backgrounds (Véron, 2016). The religious groups mostly reflect the ethnic groups: most people identify as Christian and 65 per cent are orthodox – in line with the two thirds of ethnic Macedonians – and 33 per cent are Muslim – mostly the Albanians living in Skopje (Ibid.). These groups are unevenly distributed within the urban space.

As mentioned before the Northern part of Skopje is where most of the Albanians live. Here is also the old bazaar, Ottoman Empire architecture and a number of mosques. In the southern part the majority of the ethnic Macedonian population lives and accompanying this, most of the churches were constructed south of the Vardar. The reality was that after the rebuilding of the city and after the changing of regimes, which resulted in privatising of the public property of much of the housing and which was often in the benefit of Albanian families, 'the identities of the neighbourhoods become more pronounced as ethnic fragmentation deepens' and 'seemingly trivial details, such as the color of the bricks or the alphabet used on the façade, become indicators of identity' (Mattioli, 2014; Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011: 23).

Close to Civil War - 2001

Even though conflicts were present the events of 2001 were a surprise for the international crowd. While there were many tensions in the Balkan region – the Kosovo war had just erupted and several others had been taking place as part of the Yugoslav Wars – Macedonia was not on the list as a possible place for risk (Kubiena, 2012). In 2001, however, it was in this supposedly stable country that armed conflict broke out. An organization formed by ethnic Albanians started a protest and uprising for equal rights for their minority group (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011).

The conflict lasted less than a year and was ended with the Ohrid Agreement without really turning into a civil war. No fighting even happened within the city of Skopje. It did get to the borders of the city though and still had an influence on the relationships between the people. More importantly the Ohrid agreement that was signed to dissolve the conflict had more specific results for the city. Apart from giving the Albanian people more rights and striving for their integration into the society, there was also a process of decentralisation to provide local and regional authorities with more autonomy to soften the conflicts (Daskalovski, 2006). The administrative city borders of Skopje changed because of this and the municipalities within the capital were re-ordered. Resultantly the Albanian population, with now just over 20 per cent, was big enough for Albanian to be recognized as an official second language next within the capital region (Changova, 2005; as cited in Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011).

Perhaps the Ohrid agreement prevented further armed conflicts, but even today there are still tensions between the people. These tensions are expressed in the built environment as mentioned before, but continued even after the 2001 conflict. Already in 2002 a huge

cross, the Millennium Cross, was constructed on top of the Vodno Mountain. Visible from almost the entire city, even more so during the night as it is lit, it seemed a quite intense reminder of the dominating Christian and ethnic Macedonian population. A 'counter-attack' could perhaps be imagined in the construction of the Skenderbeg monument in 2006 in the Albanian part of town. Although only small in comparison with the 66 meters tall Mileniumski Krst, this 7 meters tall statue is a monument to the Albanian freedom fighter Skenderbeg (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011).

Former Yugoslavic Republic of Macedonia and the EU

Current Macedonia, which is actually in full called Former Yugoslavic Republic of Macedonia because of name dispute with Greece, is a candidate for membership of the European Union. Already since 2004 its request has been pending, but even after the acceptance in 2014 the next steps have not been taken yet (Muhic & Takovski, 2014). The name has been one of the obstacles as Greece seems reluctant to acknowledge the country as having any right to the heritage of ancient Macedonia and its Alexander the Great (Muhic & Takovski, 2014; Kubiena, 2012).

Reflecting on both these relations with other countries, but also within its own contested borders nationhood has not been easy on the country. Comparable to other post-socialist states in the area creating a national identity has become of great importance especially with increased global influences (Kubiena, 2012; Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016). To change perceptions of these new countries achieving economic success is but one of the ways they think to compete in the global market.

These things are also a concern for the cities, especially a capital city like Skopje that represents its country and is the main space for investment and economic activities. An urban planning project in this city that has not had any intensive planning happen to it since the forming of the independent country thus has to tackle quite a lot. With this historical perspective and against the current fragmented urban landscape that Skopje consists of, the government started one of these urban development projects in 2010. This context as described above may illustrate that any kind of urban planning project in this city has to deal with a very complex situation, both visible and invisible.

Zaandam

A small city just outside of Amsterdam – although practically part of the agglomeration that the capital is becoming – Zaandam is not a spectacularly well-known place although it does attract some tourism to its Zaanse Schans. It developed like many post-industrial towns in the Netherlands as they grew at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century into small cities that is inherently connected to its surrounding bigger cities. Currently the municipality has around 153.000 inhabitants (Zaanstad Municipality Statistics).

From Providing Foods to Providing Workers

The history it values most are the glory days of the region during the Industrial Revolution of the Netherlands at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. The Zaan region benefitted from its excellent location along the Zaan river that flows towards Amsterdam (Arnoldus, 2003). Al along the river factories, windmills and warehouses were placed to handle the recourses coming in from the trade. The windmills were able to use these resources and ready them for further production so that plenty of cookie or rice factories, sugar refineries, and even oil production were successful in the region (Arnoldus, 2003). Their products could easily be transported to the rest of the country and made the Zaan the biggest supplier of food for the Netherlands (Arnoldus, 2003). However with the increase of mechanisation and globalisation in the 20th century the region slowly lost most of its industry as the family-owned businesses were taken over by big multinational companies and production was taken to cheaper countries (Arnoldus, 2003).

Only around the 60s and 70s the position of the region started to change with 1974 marking a specific milestone. In that year the multiple villages of the Zaan were brought together into the one municipality of Zaanstad – which literally means Zaan*city* (Arnoldus, 2003). With the change Zaanstad switched from being all about industry and working to a residential city from which people could go to other towns and cities to work (Arnoldus, 2003). Amsterdam was and is of course the biggest labour market for people living in Zaandam and surroundings. As the report on *Inverdan* describes Zaandam is getting more intertwined with Amsterdam as the municipalities around the capital and the Randstad with its multiple nuclei are attracting people from these big cities to live in the smaller ones (Masterplan Inverdan, 2003).

Zaandam attracts a considerable amount of people who are seeking affordable housing in the Amsterdam region (from the Amsterdam Central Station to Zaandam takes a little less than 15 minutes by train). The capital city deals with space issues and rising rents. This affordable housing thus also extracts Amsterdammers to Zaanstad. According to the Master Plan (2003) for the project the city could even be considered as the 'Gate to the Randstad' which will be of more importance in the years to come.

Tourism

Perhaps it is not part of the education, but the well-known and of the biggest supermarket chains in the Netherlands, Albert Heijn, is originally from the Zaan and has in tribute of its origins been providing Dutch households with cookies: sweet simple biscuits with a chocolate top that has a relief of Zaanse houses on it. Perhaps not so relevant to the project but at least to creating a reference point among people from the Netherlands these cookies are a tribute to the region and its traditions, just like the new *Inverdan* project is.

Foreigners might not have this immediate recognition. Nonetheless the region is a well-known tourist destination as the parts along the river Zaan have an assembled collection of windmills, little green houses and warehouses as reminders of the flourishing industries

that found their origins there at the Zaanse Schans. I want to stress the ‘assembled’. Completely in line with all the constructs and narratives I am analysing in my research, these windmills and houses and so on were not originally there, but brought to the Zaanse Schans as it is called in the 60s and 70s to retain a sense of its past and to provide it a touristic character (Arnoldus, 2003). Thus the region has been somehow on the mental map of people in and thus perhaps also outside of the Netherlands. This project marks it entering into a new sphere of recognition and visits. Tourists now flock to come see the funky architecture, as a day trip from Amsterdam, or even as their place of staying for then conveniently visiting the capital city. And so it creates a completely new relation between Amsterdam and its close neighbour.

| Introducing the Projects

Skopje 2014

Presentation

Already since 2006 plans to carry out a big scale development started to take shape in the city and state government of Skopje and Macedonia respectively. Small bits of information reached the public, but only in 2010 this big project called *Skopje 2014* was presented. The government showed off its new 80 million euro plan with a 6 minute long video (Stefanovski, 2010). In it a transformed Skopje is shown. Accompanied by dramatic classical music it shows a lively, everyday Skopje, however, among the people and cars there are 3D projections presenting what the city, supposedly in 2014, should look like. It shows the river suddenly flanked by white facades of neo-classical and neo-baroque buildings and people are suddenly accompanied by many statues of different kinds. Lions, warriors, revolutionaries in classical styles right in the middle of brutalist, modernist Skopje. Several years later many of these virtual realities from the video have become actual realities, and – although *Skopje 2014*, again, really suggests it should have been finished in that year – still more buildings and statues were being constructed in the past year until the new government stopped any more developments after their formation in May of this year.

Stills from the video presentation made for the Skopje 2014 project. On the left a visualisation of the statue of 'the Warrior' or Alexander the Great on the renamed Macedonia Square. On the right the new waterfront with new bridges, the museum and fountains.
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iybmt-iLysU

What and Where

Apart from its many statues, decorative triumphal arches and restaurant boats in the Vardar river the project also contains several new buildings or revamps of old ones. Most of those are around the Macedonia square, the central spot of Skopje, and the river. There is the new Museum for the Struggle of Macedonians, the Archaeological Museum but also government buildings have been given a new look such as the government headquarters and the Constitutional Court. Another important part of the project has been to build underground and multi-storey garages for car parking close to the main square and close to the shopping mall. All of the new constructions are in the central part of Skopje, mostly on the Southern side of the river, in only a small part of town but with a high number of sculptures and buildings.

Intentions and Goals

Skopje 2014 was presented under the VMRO-DPMNE government or the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for the Macedonian National Unity. This government was highly influential in the forming of the project not only in general terms as it was one of the main investors but even for specific details. This last bit was revealed to public disbelief during the wire-tapping scandals that busied Macedonians in 2015. In some of the conversations prime-minister Nikola Gruevski discussed *Skopje 2014* and his personal requests or demands for the project such as fountains and statues, much like other European cities (Balkan Insight, 2015).

The conservative, nationalist and liberal VMRO-DPMNE when presenting *Skopje 2014* back in 2010 never gave a clear statement on the intentions. Much more so, like many other aspects of the development plans, it remained vague as to why the project was happening at this point in time and in this style (Kubiena, 2012). Apart from the 3D video, which apparently had to speak for itself, there was not much shared with the public. There were some statements from officials, but no full explanations. One of these statements that could be reflected on focuses on the project's reference to the ancient times and how it is a 'chance to create a tangible manifestation of Macedonian identity' (Kubiena, 2012: 88). While a representative from the Ministry of Culture pointed out the role of art as being used 'to prettify the city and give it the look of a genuine metropolis' (Angelovska, 2014: 180). As perhaps a third intention later on the project's expenses that were brought to light as being way more than stated in the beginning the Minister of Culture herself justified the investment as providing economic benefits as it would have influence on 'structural engineering, encouraging the growth industry, creating new jobs, and contributing to the accumulation of additional income from the number of tourist visits' (Muhíc & Takovski, 2014: 147). The increased tourism and creation of new jobs has often been used as excuse for validating the project along with the idea that the new landscape will attract foreign investment and attention (Graan, 2016; Graan, 2013).

Actors and costs

The sudden presentation of an already completely thought out project for the city centre is obviously not one that seems to concern itself with transparency. The little information that had been shared had in no way prepared people for the developments. Not to mention that even when it was presented the plans throughout the years would change suddenly without any consulting and the supposed budget of 80 million euros was easily surpassed with an estimation of around 560 million euros that went into the construction, promotion and managing of Skopje 2014 up to 2015 (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011). The fact that an architect from Skopje right after the project's presentation sued the city 'as contracting authority' for not being transparent in the process before its presentation says a lot (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011: 99). Even more so when the court actually ruled that it had indeed a big lack of transparency and decided that either the tendering process should be redone or the already built constructions should be destroyed for the project not to be defined illegal. This apparently did not bother the city as it continued constructing without changing anything about the approach of sharing information with the public (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011).

In 2015 however the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network published an investigation into the costs, contributors, involved actors and so on to reveal exactly what the government had been spending money on and who had been the big profiteers. The report *Skopje 2014*

Uncovered was published widely through a website and even an app. The Macedonian government was identified as the main investor with the Ministry of Culture and the Procurement Bureau spending most money on the building of the new cultural institutions such as the National Theatre and the new museums. However private investors also have their part in the project as many of the monuments or statues are funded by them and certain new commercial spaces are actually projects of entrepreneurs from Skopje. The city actively provided space and opportunities for private actors to take part in *Skopje 2014*. The actors who got most out of participating in the project were not only the 5 big contractors but also the artists behind the main statues and monuments. Currently *Skopje 2014* counts 137 structures with 32 investors, 143 companies and 150 authors involved for a cost of over 680 million euros (Skopje 2014 Uncovered). Important to note is that the role of the city government or even of the city centre municipality is hardly present in the forming of this project. The power on the urban level is still in the hands of the national government as it latches onto the urban space to recreate its construct of the national identity.

Inverdan

Presentation

Much unlike *Skopje 2014* the project in Zaandam that started around 2001 got a full-fledged master plan published in 2003 that straightforwardly outlines the intentions and plans that would take place in the coming years. With Soeters van Eldonk Architecten at the rear the project initiated its construction start in 2007 and still continues today. Several new projects have been added to and in relation with *Inverdan* in the past two years and some new ones are still planned that carry on the vision created by the architects. The main part of *Inverdan* had been focused on the area directly in the center of Zaandam which is closely linked to the station. However many of the newer plans are also taking into account other parts of town and the region. Still the heart of the project is what is instantly visible when one walks out of Zaandam station into the main shopping street.

What and Where

The focus of the project as has been said before is on the city centre of Zaandam, the biggest city in the Zaanstad municipality. Previously this area of the city had nothing spectacular to it and was just a zone to pass through from the station to the home or perhaps to do some shopping. With *Inverdan* some new elements were introduced in terms of the landscape such as the height differences and the revived canal in the middle of the street, but also in terms of functions. Most probably the eye-catcher and attention seeker is the new Intell Hotel which has right from the start been the main protagonist in promotion of the project and the new image of Zaandam. The city hall has been revamped in a specifically central location nest to the train station. The shops and shop fronts are sporting new facades as well. Apart from commercial and new functions the real estate share in the area has been increased generously through the project along with office space. Around 1900 housing units and 140.000 m² of office space were in the original plans. The amount of new housing being constructed within the project has however increased since the start of the programme. In the last published report from the beginning of the year the plans talk about almost 2900 residences (Actualisatie 17.1 – Inverdan Verstedelijkt, 2017).

Intentions and Goals

The biggest part of the project focuses on developing the centre of Zaandam to consequently, as the master plan states, 'strengthen the economy of the region, to attract more high-quality employment opportunities in the service sector, a concentration of economic and social functions around the public transport node and a more intensive land use of the city centre' (2003: 3). Related to its motto to show Zaandam's hidden talents it does not mean to be pretentious – as this would not fit the city or the people or the built form – but it wants to show the outside what it is worth (Master Plan Inverdan, 2003). The philosophy presented by Soeters Van Eldonk Architects that ties together the many aspects comes together in the following three aims:

1. Strengthening the spatial coherence between the river, the train station area and the western part of the city by creating a vibrant city centre.
2. Strengthening and broadening the social en economic structure by attracting modern offices, creating new housing situations for different target groups and improving the quality of facilities.
3. Strengthening the communal identity of the multiple nuclei municipality by upgrading the centre and building the new town hall next to the train station.
   (Masterplan Inverdan, 2003: 17)

If these plans turn out to be successful and the potentials and quality of the city are made visible through Inverdan it should result in Zaandam turning up on the mental map of decision makers. Although it is not made clear who these decision makers are, it is safe to assume the people meant here are the companies and organizations seeking offices that could provide Zaandam with the service jobs it so adamantly wants to attract.

Moreover Inverdan as an urban project also seems to want to appeal to other groups, such as tourists. The Intel Hotel is perhaps the most iconic and the most promoted building of the Inverdan project and is obviously not built for the residents of the city. Not to mention that another hotel, not conceived in the original plans, started construction last year and should be open by the end of 2017, as tourist numbers increased (Actualisatie 17.1 – Inverdan Verstedelijkt, 2017: 18). This surge of tourism obviously has to do with the way that the project was promoted. The hotel had higher occupancy rates than expected as a result of an intensive touristic marketing campaign (Actualisatie 14.1 – Samen Verder!, 2014: 6). It was even part of the Amsterdam experience to make a trip to the nearby city and experience its crazy architecture, resultantly giving Amsterdam the much needed spreading out of its concentrated tourism.

Figure 1. The poster pictured here could be found in the Amsterdam Central station and is part of the city's I Amsterdam tourism approach. The Russian at the top welcomes people arriving there and resultantly by using the Intel Hotel located in Zaandam invites them to come visit there too.

Costs and Actors

The costs of the project will amount to 700 million euros of which the municipality of Zaanstad will invest 224 million euros. The other estimated 476 million euros is to come from private investments. As part of the project is real estate, the 1900 housing units and 140.000 m2 of office space, this is supposed to fund part of the non-profitable aspects of the project (Master Plan Inverdan, 2003: 59). The province is also expected to invest 11 million euros. Furthermore the different parties involved are to communicate and work together through the development manager; the architects from Soeters van Eldonk.

Methodology and Methods

As my overarching question already deals with concept from different disciplines it is obvious that my methods and methodology will also be coming from different academic fields. The concept of kitsch is very much something that stems from art historical or more so cultural studies approaches, while the urban development projects obviously deal with urban studies perspectives. However both cultural and urban studies are from the get go interdisciplinary fields, something I want to use to my benefit in this thesis.

Thus I am not looking to use one method, but combine several to give as much of a cohesive and encompassing understanding of the cases. Case study work from a cultural studies perspective means focusing on the particular and acknowledging the context on a somewhat small scale approach, rather than generalising right away, to be able to later relate it to bigger issues (Alasuutari, 1996). This I aim to do by giving a thorough background to both cases as their historical overviews and current contexts are used as introduction. To then further understand the projects the urban studies framework based on dominating neoliberal and globalising practices is used to relate the specific to the broader perspective. The comparative element of this thesis is instrumental in this and takes centre stage in the concluding part which needs to resettle these 'small' cases in the grander scheme of things.

My research rests on two main analytical approaches. One is the analysis of the visuals, in the form of both the architecture as well as in representations and discussions of the projects in images and videos. This would also include my own simple observations from being in these places and experiencing some of the aspects not easily captured in photographs or the videos. The second approach based on a discourse analysis allows me to delve into the master plan of *Inverdan* or the articles written on both projects, into language based objects and in the discourse adhered to by architects or officials talking about the *Skopje 2014* and *Inverdan*. I want to take this two-tiered approach to try and get a more complete understanding of how both the object and the process part of kitsch as a cultural category can be related to *Skopje 2014* and *Inverdan.* After all some of the themes and topics related to kitsch are not actually found in the aesthetic aspect and I do not want to limit myself to this either.

Visual Analysis

After having discussed so many theoretical and contextual sides that are important to my research I find it important to return to the physicality and the material of it all. As much as the theories steer my research, the actual forms of the two projects and my own responses to it is what sparked my initial interest in this topic. Not to mention that I find it incredibly important not to just look at the actors, at the ideologies and so on, but to see how this manifests itself in space. This is what the inhabitants and visitors will experience, much more than the master plans. The aesthetics and the visuals are moreover crucial to my research as kitsch is obviously still very much based in stylistic aspects even if the processes surrounding it are as important. Here it is not only about what is seen, but also about what is made invisible. These visuals have evoked many responses, negative and positive, and are incredibly powerful in steering people's perceptions and interpretations of the projects. Thus it should not be dismissed simply as being solely about taste or 'mere kitsch'.

To achieve this refocusing on the objects and works I will thus use a visual analysis. On the one hand this will be a straightforward analysis of the architectural styles and the urban space based on both photographic material but also on my own experiences of walking

through these cities. To analyse the architecture and urban space I will relate it to the entirety of the projects and how the style in general functions in the whole project, but will also discuss very specific elements that either stand out or perfectly represent the rest of the project. There are then two kind of different visuals to be explored: the existing architecture in the urban space and the photographic, filmic or other visual representations of it. These will be approached through different ways of analysis as I try to combine observations with more hands on cultural studies like approaches to decoding visual imagery and the breakdown of the architectural style and its references. Meanwhile simple observations from my own experiences can strengthen the visual analysis in certain cases as, perhaps, the representations can also warp the reality.

Discourse analysis

Apart from solely basing my research on visual properties, I also want to delve into the actual language – apart from visual language – used to present and talk about the two projects. To do so I will use discourse analysis to look at several documents and articles, but also at other expressions in language formed by the architects or officials. As discourse I understand the different ways in which language functions as it brings together language and practice (Barker, 2011). Discourse does not only deal with text or written language, but with all kinds of language uses such as speeches or conversations. Besides, it is not limited to what language exactly is used, but also concerns itself with the who, how, why and when (Van Dijk, 1997). Thus more than just being about language, discourse deals with all forms of language in its *context* (Van Dijk, 1997).

The language aspect is crucial as I think it will link directly with some of the theories that I have talked about before. The discourse I want to look at will be case specific, although I will connect them afterwards as well. This is first of all necessary because of the different contexts as I have already mentioned a few times, but also because of the limitations of matter that I can analyse. For Zaandam's UDP it seems logical to want to discuss the master plan that was published openly on their website and some articles from regional and national newspapers. For *Skopje 2014* there is no accessible master plan and even if there was one, it would probably have been in Macedonian which I cannot read or analyse properly. Much of the meaning could have been lost in translation. My discourse analysis for this case study thus rests on documents that were accessible to me, such as foreign press articles, academic papers by Macedonian and foreign authors and the quotes from involved actors and politicians already translated into English by these academics.

The focus of both discourse analyses might thus turn out to be slightly different. With the master plan of *Inverdan* I can really delve into the urban planning jargon. Within this document I hope to find the narrative, or the specific discourse, that the makers of the project are actively using in forming *Inverdan*. The discourse I hope to find in the articles and quotes about Skopje, and also about Zaandam, is not only about finding out what language the city government uses, but also about the way that kitsch is used by all these articles in relation to the project. I selected exactly those articles that used kitsch in its title or in its article, or was so close to naming it, that they might as well have thought of the concept while writing the article. Rather than focusing on a close reading of a few texts and really focusing on sentence structures or the use of narrative structures in these texts, I am more focusing on the use of specific words in some objects or on the who and to whom certain things are said, thus on the context of the speech and language.

Presumptions and Considerations

Some important aspects that will be taken into account in discussing discourse and visuals in relation to the objects that are part of this analysis will relate to who wrote or created the texts or imagery, but also who would have been the target audience and who has actually read and seen it. The master plan from *Inverdan* is not something that all the inhabitants will have read through attentively. It will be much more likely that they only saw the advertising boards close to the station. Thus it should be noted that certain discourse is meant for certain audiences.

In my position as researcher I clearly try to look at the bigger picture, but often only fragments are visible for the consumers as they see billboard pop up in their city showing what will be built there, or they might read newspaper articles describing the plans. Perhaps there have been moments where inhabitants could attend presentations of the plans, but to overgeneralise, there were probably not many of these moments. Thus for many their first encounter with these projects was when they actually already started building, when the construction is under way and when all decisions have already been made. The interpretations of citizens, inhabitants or tourists is then maybe more based on the fragments and on the resulting built infrastructure then on the discourse that the cities use to validate their projects. I find this important to take into account as responses from people might not be based on the amount of information that is gathered here and mostly because they are also not provided with it.

Conceptual Framework

As my approach is multi-disciplinary and uses various methods of analyses I do not want to separate them in my discussion of it either. It might seem that the visual analysis will correspond more with the stylistic characteristics of the kitsch category and the discourse analysis might relate closest to the processes and theories. However I do not want to limit the analyses and the results by having to sort them neatly into strict categories, especially because the projects are already complex enough. Thus I use the following working definition of kitsch as a conceptual framework to structure my findings, analyses and thoughts on the two projects. I think this framework allows me to easily make connections between the literature and the actual projects to create a cohesive understanding of the narratives or discourses presented in the case studies and how they relate to kitsch. For a more straight forward and clear overview of the analysed objects and materials I refer to the annex where I have put the different articles, videos and documents that I used in tables to clearly state what it is, who made it, for whom it was intended, and some short descriptions.

Conceptual Framework Kitsch

As mentioned before outlining the historical development of kitsch and its definitions or conceptions, I want to consider kitsch as a cultural category dealing with both the processes and the objects. Thus the working definition will be divided into two parts. On the one hand some of the aspects of kitsch obviously have to do with the style and its form. Here the object itself is central to discussing how kitsch can be defined. The second part of the definition deals more with processes surrounding kitsch than with the objects that are defined as such. The consumer and producer are the focus here rather than the object itself. Even though kitsch in my working definition is divided up in two parts I want to stress that these two ways of thinking about kitsch are intricately linked with each other.

| Kitsch, the Object

Instantaneous and Immediate

The first characteristic links back to one of the more outspoken accounts of kitsch from Clement Greenberg (1965; 1939). His statement of kitsch's deception of not asking for anything from its consumer except money can be related to several important characteristics of kitsch (Greenberg, 1965; 1939). Tomas Kulka (1996) outlines some of these as the conditions for something to be kitsch: what it depicts are themes and topics that deal with 'stock emotions', these themes and topics are 'instantly and effortlessly identifiable' and as a last condition kitsch adds nothing to the experience of the themes and topics it features (29, 33, 37). Where Greenberg (1965; 1939) characterised kitsch then as easy to get or to understand, unlike avant-garde art, Kulka (1996) frames it as kitsch being in a position where it cannot at all afford to be confusing. Thus kitsch objects are always legible in the sense that what they depict, what they mean and what they evoke is easily understood.

Cannibalism and Parasites

This brings us back to another element already discussed in the historical outline in the literature review. There is always something of the 'tried and tested' that comes back in kitsch (Broch, 1950; Kulka, 1996; Binkley, 2000). Just as it cannot afford to be confusing, it can also not spend time on being innovative as this would completely sabotage its earlier goal of the instant effect. Different ways of describing this parasitical tendency could go in the direction of historicism or towards that of nostalgia. Of course this historicism is closely linked to theories on postmodernism and postmodernist art with Frederic Jameson (1984) writing for example on the tendency for an architecture 'which randomly and without principle but with gusto cannibalizes all the architectural styles of the past and combines them in overstimulating ensembles' (66). Important to mention, and which can be derived from the Jameson quote, is that kitsch does not have to refer to one sole predecessor but can be a combination as well, which would relate it more and more to the sur- or perhaps hyperreal, as Noviant's quote about the kitsch-city insinuated (as cited in Nan, 1996).

Depthlessness and Facadism

One of the main critiques of postmodernism and perhaps also of kitsch has according to Frederic Jameson (1984) been its tendency to favour surface over depth of a new depthlessness. Elinn Nan (1996) in her book on postmodern urban planning uses the word facadism for the critique about the way that urban planners are basing their analyses solely on the structure's form and architecture and not on the contexts that they build in. This superficiality of both postmodernism and of kitsch, as we know now that it often becomes

just a shell through copying its predecessors, could be taken more literally too when it is related to objects, to architecture. For Jameson (1984) this symbolism comes to expression in the excessive use of glass in the new surface of the city: it reflects ourselves, the citizens, it fragments the visions and it often gives us no clue of what is on the inside. There is also a link with the idea of skin architecture as Ada Louise Huxtable (1999) described it in her work on the 'unreal' America, which was also later used by Richard Sennett (2008) to describe the relation between capitalism and the city. It is the thin layer on the outside, on the facades of buildings, that has been made attractive, beautiful and entertaining, while the insides remain conventional or neutral (Huxtable, 1999; as cited in Sennett, 2008). Thus accessibility as discussed before is not about 'entering' into something that shows depth. There is not much more but the surface. Here of course the analogy by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown (1977) of the decorated shed and the duck must of course be mentioned. It is exactly this decorated shed that has nothing behind it that the facadism and depthlessness of kitsch results in.

Sentimentality, Intensities and Effects

If there is depthlessness it would be hard to imagine there would be any feelings involved. Jameson (1984) also mentions this, but argues for there still to be feeling in its superficiality. They remain, as the previous part suggests, superficial though. Jameson (1984) therefore calls them intensities that are impersonal and fleeting. For him this 'new emotional ground tone' is the third characteristic of postmodernism as a structure of feeling (Jameson, 1984: 58). Again it resonates with kitsch as its formulaic character does not allow for any genuine or personal feelings, but for stock emotions, sentimentality and nostalgia (Kulka, 1996; Sturken, 2007). Prescribed and thus not individual, much like the symbolic meaning of the object, these feelings are instant as they can be decoded, recognized and identified quickly and thus also give immediate emotional gratification (Menninghaus, 2009). This also brings kitsch to expressing a 'feeling for feeling', rather than specifying a specific sentiment, just the fact that there is one is enough (Binkley, 2000: 142).

Falseness and Artificiality

The mixing up of the ethical and the aesthetical is what Broch (1950) identified as the difference between art and kitsch. It knows how to imitate art fully, except for this aspect. Kitsch is after all often portrayed, besides being bad art, as false art, as a fake (Broch, 1950; Dorfles, 1968). The fact that it lends and copies from previous objects and from art gives it a character of falseness, insincerity or even artificiality (Olalquiaga, 2002; Sontag, 1964). The imitating tendencies are after all not limited to art, but as Kundera (1999) for example noted it is the 'simulacrum of the good' or even the simulacrum of thinking (Wirth, 2016). In many ways it reminds of the slow degradation of the aura related to object that are copied over and over again as Benjamin argued (Benjamin, 1936; 2008). It goes against the valued aspects of authenticity and uniqueness which took center stage during modernism, but to which people still hold on dearly in the current society of mass and popular culture. Kitsch is in this simply the cheap, fake version that pretends to be more than that. Thus there seems to be some kind of illusion or lying present in the working of kitsch that is easily interpreted by people as bad and without value (Broch, 1950; Binkley, 2000).

Repetitiveness and One Meaning: The Formula

As kitsch tends to stick to what has already been done and often, to perhaps frame it more positively, borrows from other styles it tends to indulge in the use of conventions (Binkley,

2000). It creates objects that have a repetitive character as none of its elements are in any way surprising, something that flourishes in the routines and everyday life (Ibid.). This can apart from the style also be contributed to the way that kitsch communicates. According to Umberto Eco (1989) kitsch lacks the poetic function. Where this would normally allow for ambiguity and a multiplicity of interpretations that can be continuously questioned, kitsch is static and communicates merely one meaning or message (Eco, 1989). He states that 'the decoding of the message if already familiar, loses its surprise function' and that 'accepting a particular message because of a previous decoding that has stuck, that has turned into formula, that sticks like a tag to the message' (Eco, 1989: 197). Thus the formulas of kitsch are not only linked to the themes and to the sentiments it refers to or evokes, but also to the way that the communication system functions. It is here reinforcing its 'intolerance of ambiguity', which works with eliminating of any thought and critical thinking, as consensus dominates any of the interpretations (Wirth, 2016; Binkley, 2000). This will be instrumental in the processes that form part of the cultural category as this communication of meaning goes beyond the object itself and its tendency to eliminate critical thinking, reflection of disagreement is used in further processes.

| Kitsch, the Process

Class and Status

Class has always been part of the kitsch cultural category in one way or another. Its popularity being intricately linked with the rise of new classes and the taking over of mass consumption means that it is very difficult to discuss it without looking into the dynamics between kitsch and class (Calinescu, 1987; Broch, 1950; Kjellman-Chapin, 2010). Baudrillard (1998) even went as far to say that there would be no kitsch if there was no social mobility in our society. In typifying of kitsch it is also quite clear to which class it belongs when looking at many of the theories. Kitsch is part of mass culture, of the lowbrow of mid- and masscult, of the masses and so on (Eco, 1989; Baudrillard, 1998; Greenberg, 1965; 1939; Bourdieu, 1984). However the distinction between classes is not so clearly to be defined anymore by saying how one group actively consumes kitsch and the other would never think of it. Kitsch has been making appearances in art, in postmodernism and beyond, and it is no longer limited to the middle class households. The high and lowbrow distinction has after all been prone to blurring in the past decades and kitsch has been instrumental in this (Sturken, 2007; Edelman, 1995). Even though it is more complex to link kitsch to class in relation to this blurring of the differences it has not left hierarchical structures (Kjellman-Chapin, 2010). The upper classes still utilise kitsch or appropriate it in ways that acknowledge the kitsch to be kitsch and present it in ironic appreciation for objects that the lower classes enjoy without any such reflection (Ibid.). In the end it could be argued that then this 'does not dissolve social distinctions but reconstitutes them in a more covert form' (Kjellman-Chapin, 2010: 32).

Inclusiveness

Even though some groups might try to exclude themselves from the target group of kitsch as they position themselves in the upper classes, into the avant-garde and cultural elites, the work of kitsch is not excluding them. Or as Milan Kundera (1999) put it: 'For none among us is superman enough to escape kitsch completely' and 'No matter how we scorn it, kitsch is an integral part of the human condition' (256). Its feelings of sentimentality and utter enjoyment are after all ultimately inclusive as it makes room for everyone and speaks to shared referents and values, a universality (Binkley, 2000; Kulka, 1996; Sturken, 2007). It is thus inclusive as it speaks to many, if not to say all, consumers, but it can also give the sense of *being included*

which is perhaps even more important. For this I would again like to refer to a quote from Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*:

> Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass!
> The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass!
> It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch.
> (Kundera, 1999: 251).

As Kundera's quote shows kitsch is incredibly reassuring as it makes you feel part of mankind, part of the group, included. Thus it relates back to the effects and feelings discussed as part of the object or work that is kitsch as inclusiveness does not achieve a personalised feeling, but one that clearly links to a collective or to the masses (Sturken, 2007).

Embeddedness and Comfort Culture

Sam Binkley described kitsch as a blanket that 'tucks us in' by using conventions, habits, traditions and repetitive practices (Binkley, 2000: 142). Inclusiveness then is presented as embeddedness as this blanket that is kitsch wraps around people and gives them coherence or a sense of being in a society that is ever changing, unpredictable and unstable (Binkley, 2000). Thus not only is the object itself stable and fixed in its one meaning, but it also provides this (false) sense of stability. This blanket after all not only keeps the consumer warm and cosy but does this in a form that through its repetitive aspects is able to exclude 'surprise, dissonance and thought' resulting in something that is simply enjoyable and comfortable (Binkley, 2000: 141).

If it is in the tourism industry in the face of trauma and crisis, as Marita Sturken discusses, or in politics as Catherine A. Lugg describes, or simply in everyday life practices as mentioned before, comfort is a key ingredient in kitsch's recipe (Sturken, 2007; Lugg, 1999). In any of these cases it also relates back to the feeling of being included and being part of the group. Even though it reminds a lot of Romanticism's typical want to 'escape from reality' the idea of embeddedness actually works the other way around as it shows reality in this stable manner. After all the comfort kitsch provides does not only arise from knowing that other people share your experience, but your experience is validated exactly because there is an awareness created of how universal this feeling is (Sturken, 2007). The intended response reinforces itself as it is presented as the only appropriate experience.

As noted in the introduction kitsch' associations with nationalist art, with fascism and so on are worth mentioning as it shows the ways it can be used for a certain agenda. Within the framework of a comfort culture kitsch works especially well as it can present nationalist and patriotic feelings as comfortable as it provides a sense of belonging (Sturken, 2007; Lugg, 1999). After all nationalist art could be said to have the same constraints as kitsch, as it can never be truly personal and has to be based on traditions rather than on innovation as Michael Ignatieff (1993) famously argued in *Blood and Belonging*.

In the Eye of the Beholders

I want to end the working definition with focusing on the question of power. Of course the class hierarchies show one relationship, but there must be many more. As kitsch is often said to be so dependent on taste, a personal preference, I think the previous has shown there is

actually little power for the individual in the case of kitsch. Perhaps it is different once we analyse kitsch in the context of the home and the everyday life, but on the scale of the museum or the city and as part of urban planning taste turns into something public. Not to mention that there must be some basis of agreement on certain values and the worth of (historical) referents before kitsch can be successful in its parasitical but comfort providing inclusivity. Then it seems like kitsch is not at all in the eye of the *beholder* as would be argued by some, but more as Thomas Kulka (1996) explores; it is in the eye of the *beholders* (3). For a work to be put in the cultural category of kitsch thus depends immensely on a power of a group or a collective: If it is either the elite defining the culture of the low and middle brow to be kitsch, or if it is the universalism alluded at with the second tear from Kundera's quote. Perhaps the intentions of the artists or makers lose their relevance as works are interpreted and appropriated. Perhaps the artist or maker is really able to create something that can only be read in one specific way. In any case, kitsch is not kitsch without the *kitschmenschen*, the kitsch consumers or the beholders.

The questions that remain are not so much about what exactly is kitsch, after all it is an alluding concept, but much more for what it can be used, how and if these constructs can be dismantled. Secondly the responses are crucial as Sturken (2007) mentions how 'the challenge to understanding how kitsch operates today is to see the range of responses that it produces, to consider how it can encourage both a prepackaged sentimental response and a playful engagement, simultaneously and to varying degrees, with history, innocence, and irony (21). However where she emphasizes the responses, I want to focus a bit more on how kitsch thus can be (mis)used in a context of urban planning and what kind of responses these uses encourage and endorse. Not to forget that 'much of the culture of comfort functions as a form of depoliticization and as a means to confront loss, grief, and fear through processes that disavow politics' (Sturken, 2007: 6). Kitsch flourishing in utter enjoyment should thus be looked at critically. Especially once it is acknowledged that perhaps being all-inclusive and universal is incredibly tricky in the coming case studies. This is therefore what I aim to do in the next section where I discuss the analyses and the results I have gathered.

Analyses Part A: Skopje 2014

What's In a Name?

To start off this analysis I want to very simply have a look at the title of this project. *Skopje 2014*, seems pretty straight forward, especially when presented in 2010. It will be a view on Skopje after the project has finished in 2014, it looks forward into the future with quite some confidence. However with 2014 already 3 years in the past and the project still underway, with budgets being surpassed and ever more statues being installed, this just seems ironic. Obviously it is impossible to have changed the name with each extra year passing, but for the project to still carry this name it makes it meaningless as its future vision of Skopje was not achieved then. In itself there is already nothing that deals with any content of the plans in this title. It has now become an empty referent to its projection, to its confidence in achieving the Skopje of 2014 in that year. Especially now that a new government has been formed that opposes the former one directly, and has actually stopped any further developments on the project as it reconsiders how to deal with it, the idea of a *Skopje 2014* becomes just an empty construct.

| The Object

Instantaneous and Immediate

Skopje is already a city full of overt signs and symbols because of its expression of identities through religious objects, the use of a specific script or a certain building style. Then there is the fact that there has been no coherent planning principle in a long time and the last one was only finished in parts. Thus the city already consists of fragments, of an overabundance of signs that reinforce the oppositions in the city. The massive statues and new buildings now found in the city centre only contribute to this idea. Much like the already existing structure of the city these are not coherent in style or form. What does provide some sense of unity in the new monuments and buildings is their monumentality evoked by the massive scale and the all-round easily accessed legibility. All of the monuments are figurative and have representational styles that makes it easy to recognize what or whom is depicted.

Moreover the people the statues depict and the monuments are dedicated to are (significant) figures from the region's history. Some of them are poets or writers, others are military symbols, religious figures or political revolutionaries; all people that the inhabitants probably recognise from their history lessons. Thus it is immediately clear that this project expresses its massive appreciation of the Macedonian history as it presents the heroes in monuments and sculptures. No effort is needed to see that Macedonia's history is shamelessly lauded with all these monuments and sculptures dedicated to its 'heroes'. However there is also not much effort necessary to see what 'heroes' are not included as will become clear later on.

Figure 2. Equestrian Warrior, or Alexander the Great, statue by night.

Cannibalism and Parasites

As incoherent and chaotic, existing of fragments and eclectic collages, as Skopje was before, the project is not adding much of a coherent visions to it either. The project stands out completely from its surroundings and even itself is not set on using one style. Some of the buildings take more of a neo-classical approach, while others are reminiscent of baroque architecture, nor are all the statues similarly sculpted. However there is a consistency as all these styles are lent, borrowed or cannibalised from Western European cities. The style, but also the type of constructions – such as the Triumphal Arch from which the main square and project site can be entered – are not only reminiscent of but clearly copying cities like Paris or Vienna (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011). In the video used for the presentation there are even double-deckers featured, much in the style of London's iconic red buses (Mattioli, 2014).

This connects with some of the comments officials of the Ministry of Culture have made in relation to the project where for example the focus on more sculptures and monuments was validated because any European capital has them and so Skopje should too (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011). The city is even put in a context where it does not live up to all the standards set by these European cities, almost as if to become a 'real' city it has to achieve to become a European one first (Mattioli, 2014). However as much as this European city does not really exist, the vision presented through *Skopje 2014* has had to lend bits and pieces from different places and styles and presents a patchwork of a city, a hybrid city. Perhaps something that is much more in line with Noviant's description of the 'surreal' city that postmodernist urbanism concerns itself with than a 'real city' (as cited in Nan, 1996: 144). Above all through stressing the Westernisation of Skopje it automatically leaves in the dark any of the 'Easternness', if this refers either to the country being in an Eastern-European context with its socialist past or the older heritage of the Ottoman empire and the presence of Islamic culture.

A big part of this goal to achieve 'grandness' is found in the tendency for antiquisation in both the stylistic references and in the construction of the new Macedonian identity. As a new nation it adheres great importance to proving an origin to the nation or the idea of it at least. The Macedonian government actively uses antiquity as a starting point to prove continuity to the current nation (Graan, 2013; Mattioli, 2014; Muhíc & Takovski, 2014). *Skopje 2014* reinforces this idea. It is already in the neo-classical style, but more so in the choice for certain heroes that take centre stage. Alexander the Great and his father Filip II are obvious

choices, but also controversial in the context of the disputes with neighbouring Greece. Above all it is not even possible to truly define this as historicism as what the project is referring to is not the heritage that the city is known for. It is nostalgic for a Skopje that never existed in the first place (Mariotti, 2016; Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2014).

Sentiments of Nostalgia and Pride

It must be no surprise that, with the aforementioned and the contextual framework in mind, *Skopje 2014* is used for the government's agenda to create a coherent national identity. After all 'the over "nationalization" of urban space is one of the most striking features' of cities in post-socialist contexts (Diener & Hagen, 2013: 489). *Skopje 2014* is not just a project as part of a city branding strategy like many UDPs, but also of creating a nation brand that forms identities within the country and shapes perceptions of the country from the outside as well. This nation branding is just one of the many approaches that some of the new nation states in the post-socialist context are using to both answer to the globalising tendencies and their own new status as a country (Graan, 2013; Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016). Like many of these countries Macedonia has been struggling to enter the European Union, thus constructing a European narrative for its national identity makes sense as an effort to be integrated into Europe is made by the government (Graan, 2013; Mattioli, 2014).

Not to mention that unlike nation building that is much more about internal affairs and creating 'collective consciousness' inside national borders, nation branding deals with perceptions from the outside and thus assumes that the citizens already know who the Macedonian people are (Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016). Perhaps *Skopje 2014* then builds on this presumed pride of the Macedonian brand and only reinforces this with the new built infrastructure to make sure that foreigners will likewise see only this, and not the aspects of the identities, the cultures and the heritages that have been left out of the established 'Macedonianess'. This is of course already an allusion of the feelings of exclusion that are created at the same time, but ignored actively by the tight narrative of *Skopje 2014*.

Either feelings, both of inclusion and exclusion, are however ones based on a collective and on groups. The individual is only addressed in her or his own relation to the nation and the forced Macedonian identity. It is as if the scale of most of the sculptures and monumentality of the buildings only stresses this more. As small individual being there is no way to relate to these overwhelming symbols of power. Perhaps only in a crowd can the overpowering new constructions be countered, as seen during the big events organised by the state, but also during the protests. Only with such large numbers can the project either be properly embraced or properly attacked.

Depthlessness and Facadism

Perhaps some of the most striking images of *Skopje 2014* are of the project in its construction phase. There are photographs of the immense Alexander the Great statue – which cannot officialy have this name, but carries the title 'Equestrian Warrior' – being assembled with huge bronze coloured pieces of the horse still on the ground and of tiny workers cleaning its shiny surface. The inhuman scale is immediately clear in these images and the pre-fabricated pieces spread out on the ground look like strange puzzle pieces. However even more fascinating images are those of the buildings being covered up in white plaster planes while piece by piece the layers underneath disappear. In some cases what is hidden underneath the thin layer of fake marble skin are the simple brick constructions in other more interesting situations already existing buildings are hidden from plain sight. The government headquarters was an excellent example of socialist architecture from the days before the

FYROM, but has now been covered with a white façade of columns and blatant ignorance. It is perhaps one of the most depthless responses of the project to the urban landscape that was their canvas. It clearly does not engage with it, nor does it completely disregard it. Almost in between action and inaction it decides to just cover up this heritage while it highlights another as it fits more nicely with their new vision.

Figures 3 & 4. The Government Headquartes Before and After its Makeover

To further discuss the preference of surface over depth it is relevant to look into the functions of the new buildings and constructions. The monuments and sculptures fulfill no function but to be looked at or to instil feelings of pride or beauty as the inner city is increasingly musealised (Kubiena, 2012). With their 'monumental character' or their 'exclusive structures' they should merely be admired from the outside as symbols of power and as spectacles that do not go beyond the surface (Angelovska, 2014; Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011: 102). Indeed some of the buildings have public functions or are museums that should attract visitors, but none of these are particularly accessible.

A particular case can be made out of the new Museum for the Macedonian Struggle of which one part, the Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime, turns out to be impossible to enter unless through a group guided visit (Angelovska, 2014). The tours are strictly controlled, time wise and question wise, and lead you through a historical review that is made up out of wax figures and figurative paintings (Ibid.). Although this is not exactly representative of *Skopje 2014*, nor is it transparent enough to know if the government or the city had a hand in it, it seems relevant to show how much the history and the identity of Macedonia and Skopje are constructed within very limiting narratives and without any space for reflection.

Falseness and Artificiality

One of the reasons for people not to take the out of the blue presentation of *Skopje 2014* seriously back in 2010 too seriously was the video that was used for its promotion (Graan, 2013). As already shortly described before it is a 6-minute long video with bombastic music that shows current Skopje with the projected sculptures and buildings CGI-ed into it. The project stand out against the city as it already gives a taste of the out of place style, but also because the 'digitalness' or the 'fakeness' are in great contrast with the 'real' Skopje. The amateurish presentation of the plan however did become reality. Perhaps the clearest example that this fictional, strange new vision of Skopje seen in the video became reality is how the pompous soundtrack – called Hero's Farewell – replace with a reproduction of Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries when the light show in the fountain with the Alexander the Great statue entertains the passer-by's every night. This last scenario sounds as surreal as the

video itself looks and surely it is a strange sight to see in a very real capital city instead of a theme park.

The video and how it shows *Skopje 2014*'s vision is not the only thing that seems artificial or cringe-worthily constructed. While the agenda of *Skopje 2014* seems to busy itself with covering up, hiding, or shifting focus away from certain aspects of the city's and of the country's identity and history it also actively reinforces others (Kubiena, 2014; Muhíc & Takovski, 2014). Reconstruction is an important part of the project. With more than 50 years having passed and the city already having been rebuilt, there is still a tendency in the project to want to recover some of what was lost due to the earthquake in the 60s. The original plan proposed to recover the National Theatre, an orthodox church and the Officers Club. These building were said to date from even before the socialist regime and thus could be seen as the ultimate way of glossing over this piece of history. The church was never constructed as it sparked an outrage: having an orthodox church rebuilt on the main square of Skopje was too obvious a symbol for the dominance of the majority over the minorities (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011; Graan, 2016). In the end it was the theatre was built, based on second hand accounts or limited visual material, as not only a referent but as a clear copy.

This reconstruction, the statues, and also the other buildings, showed their depthlessness when being constructed as thin layers were applied to already existing and solid constructions and the huge puzzle pieces of horses and people were being assembled into full massive sculptures. What also became quite clear was what materials were used in among others the recreations of national heroes and reconstructions of lost buildings. Although the many referents used in *Skopje 2014* clearly also point towards rich materials such as marble, gold and bronze, this is not what has been used. Most of the bright white that can be seen in the city is made up of plaster and, more critically, it is already crumbling in some cases. The depth and solidity of marble is not provided by the simplicity of plaster that only makes the utmost outer layer look like the majestic constructs from antiquity. Underneath it is simply made out of bricks, or hides the old building in the case of the government headquarters as mentioned above. More than superficiality the thin layer thus also gives expression to ideas of falseness or artificiality. Despite and because of its cheapness the city is also already dealing with parts of the project crumbling (Mariotti, 2016).

Figure 5. Skopje's Administrative Court in the process of getting a second skin. In the background the postal office is visible as a clear marker of brutalist Skopje.

| The Process

Status and Class

With the VMRO DPMNE in power during the planning and execution of *Skopje 2014* it had a clear agenda of nationalism and a clear preference of specific groups in Macedonia over others (Graan, 2013; Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011; Stefanovska & Koželj, 2012). The hierarchy of ethnic Macedonians over the minorities in the country is still holding up strongly and the national identity promoted by the project only reinforces this. Interestingly enough the critique on the project, of which there is a lot, there are many voices coming from academia and from architects. These intellectuals have written many articles on the processes of nation branding, transitional justice, marketing techniques and the performance power of protests in relation to *Skopje 2014*. Several architecture groups have even been formed to criticise and reflect on the new plans, such as the Archi Brigade which led one of the first big protests against the building of the church on the central square (Graan, 2013; Véron, 2016).

Their status as intellectuals or as academics has also been used against them. Most of the articles that are critical are after all also written in English and do perhaps not speak to the audience within the country. However this mostly seems like a strategy from the government and its supporters to try and not give the protestors and critics any appeal with the masses (Véron, 2016; Mattioli, 2014). Although there might really be a disconnect between certain groups in the Macedonian society (Mattioli, 2014). The struggle to be more like European or Western examples is not something limited to the lower classes or to what the government has to say about it, but even in circles of young educated people there is still a desire to be more like the others rather than to be more Macedonian (Mattioli, 2014). It is just that their ideas of Europeaness might diverge from what the government wants to use in their identity construct (Ibid.).

Inclusiveness

The way that the 'normal' people are included in the project is perhaps made even clearer in the statue project. As if the planned statues had not been enough the city plans had already included a competition for amateurs and artists alike to create a statue of any kind and for any place to be included in the city centre (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2014). This project is perhaps the culmination of the lackluster coherence in style, the goals of 'prettifying' the city and the aim to make the city simply enjoyable. It also expresses ideas of inclusiveness through participatory practices. However in the framework of UDP's and neoliberal practices participation is never something directly in the interest of the 'participants'. It is quite obvious from many examples that participation is reduced to exactly the kind of thing that the Sculpture Project is: no transformative choices, no discussions, no platforms, but merely prettifying the city. Much like anything else surrounding Skopje it then is more of a 'façade of good intentions' and is not really of much value for transformative practices (White, 1996: 143).

The result of the competition is literally nothing compared to the statues erected by the government and made by artists. Although there is quite a number of them the statues are small and placed in random locations. As opposed to the heroes from the 'official' statues, the citizens' sculptures are depictions of regular people, of everyday activities, of a humble and enjoyable humanism, meant to prettify the city as officials from the Ministry of Culture have said (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011). The sculptures moreover are not in the least depicting anything that would spark contestation, criticism or ambiguity (Ibid.). They are just humble and positive in every aspect of their being: it even allows citizens to participate. Of course this merely hides the conflicts underneath and in line with reflection on participatory processes does not truly involve the inhabitants or enrich their tasks and roles, but rather depoliticises the situation (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011). Lastly this sculpture project also shows the way in which art and culture are actively used as ways of trying to improve the conditions in cities, as if making things pretty and beautiful will automatically help the residents or at least satisfy them.

Figure 6. Sculpture from the sculpture project, 'Two Girls'.

It is after all unbelievably obvious that Skopje 2014 is excluding, erasing and forgetting many of the people and much of its history. While the Europeaness is brought to the fore and a continuity from ancient times until now is being constructed, the socialist history and the not-Christian, not-ethnic Macedonian population and cultures are glossed over (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011; Kubiena, 2014). To say thus that the kitschiness of the Skopje 2014 project is all inclusive would be ridiculous when so many things are deemed unimportant for

constructing a project that is supposed to represent the country and are simply left out. There is above all no validation for this from the planners or the government and solely argumentations that solidify what has been emphasised, not what has been erased. Hence, I would not argue that Skopje 2014 was meant to be inclusive to everyone by its creators, but perhaps it does want to seem all encompassing simply by not mentioning what alternative narratives and cultures exist. Kitsch, which is supposed to be appreciated and enjoyed by all, based on its universality, and which should have room for everyone would be the ultimate way of giving the sense that the project is trying to be inclusive. The project simply reinforces the right of the ethnic, Christian Macedonians to claim their image and their identity as the only true one and on the backs of the minorities. They can use this kitsch to their advantage.

Embeddedness and Comfort Culture

The blanket that *Skopje 2014* as instrument for the government symbolizes is surely trying to give the inhabitants some stableness through a constructed national identity. On the one hand there is clear validation for anyone who adheres to this identity and sees their idea of Macedonia represented in the built form of Skopje. Their sense of belonging to this group who values their country is only reinforced by the sense of place that Skopje aims to reproduce. In its claim that the history and heritage it presents is its own, either because it stems from the continuity it draws from the antiquisation or from the European referents it uses as examples, it can also furthermore argue that this project is something that is specific to Skopje. In the end this last bit is very true, but perhaps not in the sense that *Skopje 2014* tries to convey.

Rather the project indirectly shows, as it in its form does not mention and glosses over this, the conflict within the country and within the city. The style and the themes used are exactly what could be expected from the political situation in Macedonia as it tries to hold on to it nationalistic tendencies while also trying to compete on the global scale. Nation branding is such a perfect example of how these two come together, also in creating comfort for its inhabitants. And this comfort is mostly created because *Skopje 2014* denies any conflict. Its narrative is one that simply expresses pride without acknowledging any of the blemishes. It covers up pieces it does not want to become part of what the country and the city are known for. Meanwhile the officials talk about making the city pretty and beautiful, to attract tourists and to attract foreign investors, all for the good of the city and the people: something that does not encourage any reflection or criticism. The logic *Skopje 2014* presents is one that might come as a relief, as reassuring, for Skopjeans and Macedonians whose city and country are told over and over again they do not yet live up to the standards set by others, by the European Union. They are now encouraged to be proud and to enjoy the spectacle that their city is as it after all will only benefit the Macedonians in all kinds of positive ways as it supposedly enriches the culture and turns it into economic benefits too.

Eye of the Beholders

It must be clear by now that the project in the Macedonian capital is not without conflict. The many different critiques go from accusations of embezzlement and the lack of transparency in the planning and decision making processes to the misunderstanding of the values of Macedonia, the privatisation of public space and it being a clear materialised version of the totalitarianism of the government (Muhic & Takovski, 2014; Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2014; Angelovska, 2014). For many the exuberant style itself was enough to dislike the project, as the earlier mentioned Archi Brigade for example reasoned. There were concerns that outsiders would look and laugh at Skopje and Macedonia, that their country was not

represented accurately (Graan, 2013). Apart from being inaccurate representation, it could as well be inaccurate branding of Skopje and the country. What happens in these discussions is that surely the government is criticised for the way that they handle the Macedonian brand, but not for the practice of wanting to brand a country (Graan, 2013; Graan, 2016). It shows that even though some of the ideologies and agendas are very apparent to people, others also get hidden by the emphasis on nationalist pride and its kitsch expression, which obvious candidates for critique.

Apart from people speaking out against the projects plans before and during the construction in articles or with each other, big protests started to take place in Skopje and other cities in Macedonia. After all the new buildings and sculptures in their whiteness and grandness functioned as the ultimate canvas for what was to be called the Colourful Revolution. Armed with water guns, catapults and anything filled with paint the protestors took to the streets to attack anything that was built for the project. The project was the ultimate space to stage their discontent and their resisting of the singular narrative that the project and the government had been promoting (Véron, 2016). After all it was not just this project that people were frustrated and angry with, but also the scandals surrounding the VMRO DPMNE rule since their election in 2006. The money launderings, the propaganda, the corruption, the authoritarian ruling, and police brutality were all protested against when the Colourful Revolution was in full swing in the summer of 2016 (Véron, 2016).

Through visually impressive protest – painting the main square red or using catapults and water guns filled with paint to reach the fenced off government building – they gathered attention from the international press that was not superficially focused on the buildings and the statues as they delved deeper and presented Macedonia as a conflicted country (Mayer, 2013; Launey, 2014; Crevar, 2016; Gillet, 2015). Sadly also this protest turned into something of a spectacle, as one of the involved activists also noted when presenting during a conference on Connecting European Struggles in 2016 in Malmö (Shadow, 2015). The visual power of the colours was easily marketed as t-shirts started to be sold and even more so when many of the activists actually joined the political system they were so harshly criticising (Shadow, 2015).

The protests lost their power after the summer of 2016, but did reach somewhat of a satisfying result when election results came in several months after and, due to the inability for the former government to form a coalition, the opposition had its chance with the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia and its leader Zoran Zaev creating a union between mostly Albanian parties and his own. This new government has stopped further development of *Skopje 2014* and is considering how to deal with what the former government led by Gruevski has left them with. It is a tricky endeavour as the Socialist party criticised the UDP harshly for investing too much money and for being something Skopje does not need. However any interventions in undoing the project would end up in them spending even more money on it, leaving things for now unfinished and open ended (Marusic, 2017).

Figure 7. Colourful Revolution. People using paint on the Triumphal Arch.

One Meaning – The Singular Narrative

An architect in his critique on the project mentioned the 'obsessive narrativity' of *Skopje 2014* (as cited in Muhic & Takovski, 2014: 149). It does seem, simply scale-wise and because of the high density of sculptures that the new imageries are laid on so thickly. Moreover the government covers its constructedness by having politicians and involved actors speak in naturalising ways, through kitsch processes perhaps, to show how obvious it is that Skopje can link back to antiquity, to other European capitals and that the 'government is not inventing, but presenting history' (Muhic & Takovsi, 2014: 151). To use kitsch then makes sense as it clouds citizens in comfort while presenting something as familiar, totally unambiguous and just enjoyable. The argument that it would invite tourists to come look at their wonderful country was often used to validate the choices, the investments and the vulgar showiness of the project. Along with this there was also the obsolescence argument used: Skopje was incoherent, chaotic and had no vision before the project. Something had to be done and now that that something is there, this is reasoned into 'nothing is better than something' (Muhic & Takovski, 2014).

The city and government also used very specific strategies to keep the narrative of *Skopje 2014* uncontested and fully intact. The lack of transparency about any of the costs, the intentions or even the fact that plans were in the works, is perhaps a preventive approach so that the story would be coherent. However more telling are perhaps the ways the government dealt with diverging interpretations of the projects afterwards as protesters were throwing paint at the fancy exteriors. The government moreover will not allow any unsanctioned representations of the nation, under the cover of wanting to protect the brand (Graan, 2016). Then censorship, the refusing to grant permission for protests, and the media control is what truly shows the intention for keeping the narrative singular and without ambiguity (Graan, 2016). In the end even though it might not allow for any other interpretations than what is provided on a silver plate by the government, the people harshly criticised the uncomplicated vision that was presented.

Analyses Part B: Inverdan

What's In a Name?

Inverdan is a typical expression in the dialect of the region. It means 'in the far' or 'beyond' or to make it sound as old fashioned and strange in English as it actually does in Dutch 'yonder' would be a wonderful translation. The master plan presents it as something that is hidden and lies a bit further away, but what will now be shown to the public. The hidden treasures are supposed to be laid bare as *Inverdan* is supposed to present what Zaandam is actually worth and of how much value it is (Master Plan Inverdan, 2003). Other than it implying some kind of depth and some kind of hidden object as the master plan presents it, it is also a typical regional thing. This word does not work in another part of the Netherlands. The 'couleur locale' so strongly used in the rest of the project is already reflected in the title. In the context of talking about kitsch it seems funny that this 'inverdan', which implies depth and perspective, is used for a project that might now be considered as depthless in the following.

| The Object

Instantaneous and Immediate

Anyone arriving in Zaandam by train, and possibly also by car, will right away be in the midst of the *Inverdan* project. With the city centre being directly next to the train station and the main road hubs, there is simply no way around it. Nor will there probably be a way of avoiding it for many of the residents of the city that use the train as their way of transport, the shops in the area for their shopping and the cultural institutions for their leisure. It is also for them that the reference must be immediately clear as the colour, the style, the decorations and so on are straightforwardly used as related to the regional architecture. The website of the project even states how the new centre of Zaandam should speak in a 'recognisable language' and should be comprehensible for all Zaankanters (Inverdan, Zaanstad Website)

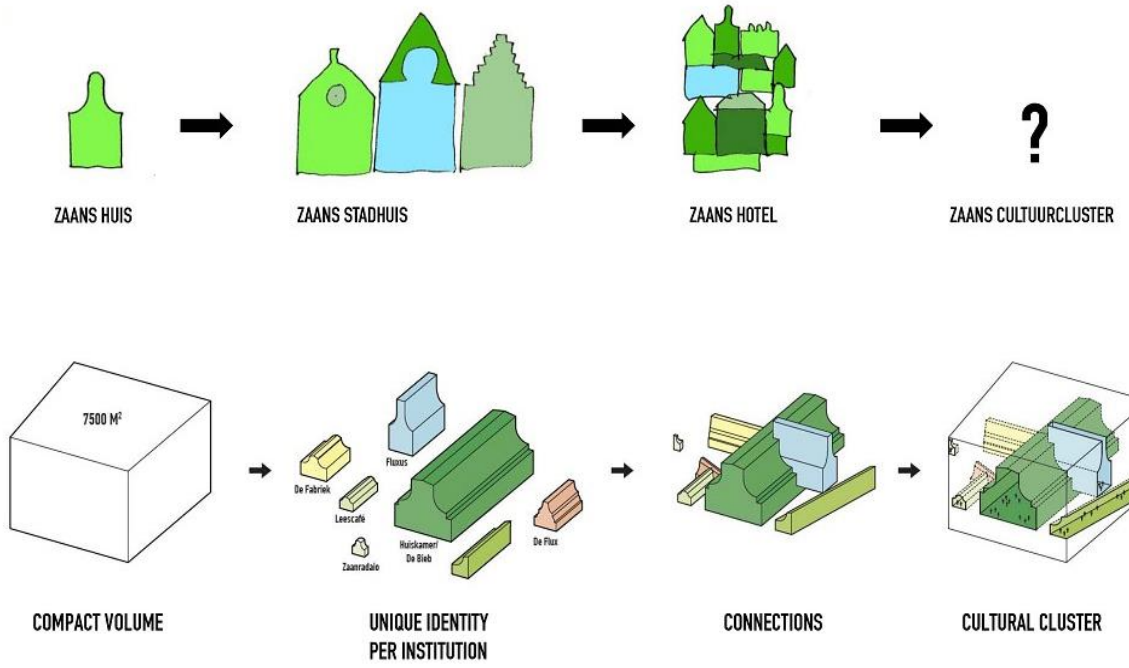
Again, very much like in Skopje, the legibility is made easier by the sheer scale and more specifically by the overabundance of references, not only through the regional architecture. Above the station clock there are two whales as a reminder of the whale hunt from the 17th century that people in the Zaan actively participated in. A blue house in the Inntel House facade refers to the short time Claude Monet spent in the town. The variety between big brick, industrial sized buildings with smaller house-like structures is according to the Master Plan supposed to reflect the glory days of the region where industrial buildings and warehouses co-existed with the windmills and cute green houses in flat landscapes (Master Plan Inverdan, 2003). Even the newly reintroduced channel is supposed to reflect the identity of the region that is based on its river, the Zaan, where its name comes from and which helped the flourishing during the industrial times. It is thus immediately visible how *Inverdan* depicts styles, histories and identities specific to Zaandam and the surroundings and so how unbelievably *zaans* it is.

Cannibalism and Parasites

Unlike the small cosy houses in Dutch landscapes, surrounded by fields and water and probably in proximity of a windmill, these buildings in the heart of Zaandam are not like this. It is not only the fact that they are not in a rural or village setting, but also the scale, the function and of course the creative interpretations of the colours, the white borders and the shapes that stray from the traditional and old way of building. As already mentioned for Dutch people it must be clear that these are the regional architecture, but perhaps a more contemporary version. Because of the many projects involved and the different designers and

architects attached to the main Master Plan, all still under the lead of Soeters Van Eldonk Architects, there are different ways of interpreting the regional architecture. There is accumulation in the Inntel Hotel, straightforward copying with the small souvenir shops close to the station and abstract referentiality in the big office spaces hovering over train tracks and roads. As much as there is coherence in the reference, there is actually no universal approach to how to quote this referent. This is brought even more to an extreme with the latest addition in the plans, the cultural cluster. This building which is scheduled to be built in the coming year and to be opened in 2019 is out of the newly built infrastructure perhaps the most abstract version of the regional architecture.

The drawings and images made by the architects from MVRDV – well known in the Netherlands for having done the design for the Markthal in Rotterdam – show a simple grey square building, but out of which shapes are cut that resemble the curled sides of the Zaanse houses. Creating a unique space, as the architects say, the new Cultuurcluster is not referring to any materiality, but solely to the actual shape of the typical houses. Not to mention that in its presentation the new design creates continuity with both the original historic style that *Inverdan* uses as its basis, but it also continues the updating and the abstracting that *Inverdan* started. Reflecting on postmodernism and the simulacrum seems to fit right in here where the original is no longer the main referent, but perhaps the copy plays a more significant role. After all the cluster that it is, comes from the combination of cultural institutions from Zaandam such as the library and the music school and the concert hall, and at the same time from clustering together the style and the shapes of Zaanse architecture. It ultimately shows that now some years after the project has been constructed, it is still underway in changing the perception of Zaandam, so much so that the project itself becomes the primary referent for new development rather than the historical reference.



Figures 8 & 9. Sketches from MVRDV for the Cultural Cluster showing the references and the idea for the new building.

Sentiments of Nostalgia and Pride

With its historic reference to the old little houses from the region of course *Inverdan* manages to evoke some sentiment from the residents of Zaandam and surrounding towns and villages. More so it really emphasizes the pride of the region as this architecture, these references are specific to the Zaan. Apart from emphasizing this through the promotion, some elements in certain buildings and design aspects reinforce the pride even more. The instant recognition of the whales, the industrial and the wooden houses, the water and the little blue house referring to Monet all reinforce the worth and the promotional material of Zaandam. Especially this reference to the painter that visited the town at the end of the 19th century, for only a total of four months, seems typical. It after all plays with some of the confusions that surround one specific painting Monet made during his time there. He depicted several typical Zaans landscapes and quite a bit of its regional architecture of which *The Blue House* is one. However, as the name already suggests, this house is not green like it would have been in this period, which has left many art historians and Zaankanters confused as there is no such house now either at this spot. The reference to this painting and to the presence of Monet is interesting. On the one hand it somehow plays a stubborn role as the only blue in a sea of green, a well thought out divergence of the style. On the other hand it simply expresses the need to link the city's identity with this immensely well-known painter, a practical branding technique.

Not to leave unmentioned is also the preoccupation with making the city centre pretty and evoking a sentiment of beauty to then be proud off. The architect Sjoerd Soeters uses very personal language in his discussion of what was done by his predecessors in the brutalist and modernist language: ugly and grey boxes dominated the city ('Dutch Profiles: Soeters Van Eldonk Architects', 2012). He refers to some of the shops further in the street, ones that have not been changed yet, as ridiculous and stubborn and talks about how his condensed public space will also hide the view on the ugly bank tower. His architecture on the other hand is by him typified as funny, bright and enjoyable. He does not shy away from calling the hotel a Disney-like object. The banality of the architecture is what he himself promotes and glorifies, very much in opposition to the modernists ('Dutch Profiles: Soeters Van Eldonk Architects', 2012). The project's style thus evokes a simple sense of enjoyment, something that brings a smile to your face.

Depthlessness and Facadism

Facadism is surely an issue in the case of *Inverdan*. The title and its meaning might insinuate a perspective and depth to the project, but there is perhaps little to be found in the architecture or in the ideas behind the project. The spectacular, colourful outsides of the new buildings that reference the Zaans building style so clearly are not at all resembled on the inside. There is an overabundance of the slightly off scale green shop fronts along the main street and throughout the town, but when entering one of these stores or buildings, the C&A looks just like any other C&A, the Primark looks like any other Primark and so on. Surely then a facadism seems to typify the project and its form of skin architecture seems to fit perfectly with related ideas of how standardised consumption makes any place look like any other because exactly the same shops pop up in each city centre (Sennett, 2008). Soeters himself actually criticizes the modernism's tendency and that of the internationalist style as it creates landscapes that all look the same, as he himself explains in the video ('Dutch Profiles: Soeters Van Eldonk Architects', 2012). He wants to create something that strengthens the local identity and wants to improve place recognition. It is true that the Zaanse style would be out of place in any other context and thus could contribute to a sense of place for all the Zaanse

inhabitants. This argument becomes less relevant if his funky façades are simply covering the standardised consumption culture behind it.

The function of the buildings along the canal is mostly consuming. This makes that the accessibility of the buildings is quite crucial. The customers need to be invited inside. Especially with the reduction of the public space, and most of this is also taken up by terraces not by seating unrelated to businesses, the area just feels increasingly privatised rather than a public 'room' as will be discussed later. This is only reinforced by the change in function that the regional architecture went through. The old houses all had their own specific looks based on the identity of the people living in the house. Decorations, specific curls of the white borders and so on could tell you if the house belonged to a banker or a baker (Huisman, 2011). Surely the shop fronts now are also personalised, but for the big chains with their logos hugely displayed as their function is no longer living but commercial. Instead of having these specific identities based on people, the shop fronts merely express the commoditised new 'neo-Zaans' architecture.

Figures 10 & 11. The former C&A façade and the new 'neo-Zaans' version. Difficult to see in this picture, but the C&A logo is to be found at the top of the façade on the left as well as closer to the ground.

Falseness and Artificiality

In the copying of the regional architecture the project and all related constructions have limited themselves to the shapes, the decorations and the colours of the Zaans houses. The wood that was used to panel the little structures has been replaced by plastic, aluminum or other easy materials. Surely they give the sense of their historic referents, but it is clear that these materials will in no way evoke the same sense of time passing as the wood did. In the article published in *De Groene Amsterdammer* (2011) the author mentions the significance of the wood: it needs care, it needs layers of paint, it came from trade with the Baltic states. The plastic and other artificial materials used now are superficial layering and are easily replaced (Huisman, 2011). In a way then the material reinforces how it only partially copies the historical reference and how it does this perhaps in a superficial way that leaves out the depth of such a simple thing as wood, at the same time it also shows how through new techniques the updated version can be more practical. Perhaps it is too easy to just ascribe this to the fact that kitsch is effortless and a cheap, quick copy of the referent, as practicality is not a bad thing. The material is not even the most artificial thing about the project anyways. The waterfall attached to the new and completely constructed channel would probably take that title. However this combined with the shop fronts that reduce the identity of the facades to brands and the simple overabundance of the project it does show off and flaunt its outside spectacle more than anything that goes on behind it, literally and figuratively.

| The Process

Class and Taste

In the whole process the architects of Soeters and van Eldonk, but especially Sjoerd Soeters has had a strong voice in creating and also in promoting *Inverdan*. As mentioned before he talks about the ugliness of the legacy of the modernists in the city and how his style is more fun and banal. He talks about the need for some excessiveness to attract tourists to spend money in the form of the hotel. Furthermore he mentions something incredibly relevant to the concept of kitsch. He claims that the 'normal people' or 'the people who did not study architecture' love the style ('Dutch Profiles: Soeters Van Eldonk Architects', 2012). The same idea is reflected in articles written on the project: architects are critical, normal people enjoy the smile it brings to their faces (Witman, 2010 ; De Lange, 2010). Not necessarily speaking of class differences, but definitely defining the difference in tastes between educated or non-educated groups of people it demonstrates quite nicely the conflict kitsch can sometimes bring. While the architects probably have the tools to dismantle and scrutinise the project and can acknowledge the kitschiness of the project with irony, this does not reflect the process of consumption of *Inverdan* by 'normal' people. The logic it presents and the comfort it provides do not at all encourage the inhabitants to be critical. Not to mention that, thinking back on Skopje as a case study, the context of Zaandam is simple enough to not spark many intense contestations.

Inclusiveness

One of the solutions for the heart of Zaandam to become vibrant is found in the creation of a centre that has mixed functions. The master plan focuses on this extensively to show how a dynamic will exist between the different functions that support one another. Thus inclusiveness could simply be the inclusion of shopper, workers, residents and so on. All of them are supposed to feel at home when visiting the new beating heart of Zaandam. However who are perhaps most catered for and pampered with the new functions and the new lay out with its seamless connection to the train station are perhaps the visitors, rather than the inhabitants. Tourism plays a big role in the project if not only because of the eye-catcher being the Inntel Hotel, then perhaps because of the way that the project has been used to actually promote tourism from Amsterdam.

With *Inverdan* the city has a new business card it can use to attract tourists, visitors but also companies. They are given a warm welcome with the possibility of staying in new hotels, visiting new cultural hotspots, living in the new high-class apartments or using the vast amounts of office space. The master plan states clearly that it wants to put Zaandam on the mental map of businesses and tourists and that is also plans to attract the people who want to live in the proximity of Amsterdam (Master Plan Inverdan, 2003). The low prices for housing, the incredibly quick trip to the capital and the new look can become quite attractive to millennial who want to have a taste of Amsterdam but can no longer afford to live in the main city as prices soar. As much as *Inverdan* is thus to improve the centre for the residents it also embraces any new crowds that might be interested (Master Plan Inverdan, 2003). This is of course supposed to be good for the region, economically, socially and culturally it will make Zaandam much richer.

While these new groups of people get a warm welcome the question also remains how much of the city is left out from the project. The project hopes for trickle-down effects as increased economic activity also effects people living around the project site (Master Plan Inverdan, 2003). However what the new style in the centre also does is to create a stark contrast with

the surrounding grey landscape. Turning around a corner shows a Zaandam that is very different from the flashy show in the main area. Behind the green facades is quite a grey city that deals with empty shops and houses that are not always in the best of states. It is not that the city deals with huge problems, but simply crossing the river shows a 'normal' Dutch town in comparison to the theme park of *Inverdan.* However new developments are going beyond the former boundaries of the project. Offices are refurbished, new residential towers are being built and all in 'neo-Zaans', the vision provided by Soeters en van Eldonk Architecten. Moreover the task of tackling this other side of town across the river has recently been given to the new architecture bureau from Soeters. The question remains though if this means the city and the project are being more inclusive by concerning itself with more of Zaandam or if it is simply forcing its vision on the rest too while the green wave is slowly taking over the entirety of the city.

Figure 12. View on the new channel, the Inntel Hotel, the City Hall, the Primark. This also shows the shrinking of space and one of the places where you can actually sit. Also visible is the cinema, the dark red brick, which is a reference to the industrial buildings that coexisted with the green houses along the Zaan.

Embeddedness and Comfort Culture

The inclusiveness of the project is only further established through the idea of sense of place that the master plan refers back to several times. When describing the goals and main tools the 'genius loci' or spirit of the place, is mentioned as one of the most crucial steps for the success of *Inverdan* (Master Plan Inverdan, 2003). As a main concept for the entire programme the 'genius loci' of Zaandam is typified by water, which is brought back through the reintroduction of the channel, but also by the regional architecture and the many references to heritage and history of the region as mentioned before. However, interestingly the 'genius loci' is also said to be defined through the big contrasts between scales: between industrial factories and little green wooden houses (Master Plan Inverdan, 2003). This is one of the rare mentions and actual links with the industrial past and is reflected in there being massive buildings like the cinema, next to the smaller shops that show off with their green facades.

The 'genius loci' furthermore is something that is established through a collective. This architecture and this style represents the entire region and thus not only connects with the individual who knows these references, but with the 'Zaankanters' as a group. The Zaandam heart before did not reflect on this identity at all and could have been a city centre in many random towns in the Netherlands, but this architecture is region-specific. After all it is not only the architecture it engages with but also the myriad of references in the details. All of these focus on making a consciousness of an identity, to instil some pride or nostalgia, to be consumed both by tourists and by the residents. In the end the link with the history is not presented as a static referent, but as something more of a red thread, that has always been present in the city and can be used for future developments as well. This continuity it expresses and the realisation in space can both contribute to a sort of stability. The sense of place of the project is instrumental in this too. The whole master plan and this identity question emphasize the fact that it makes absolute sense for this project to be in Zaandam.

The comfort culture that *Inverdan* provides is not only found in the architectural style and the connection with history but also in an approach that the architect very consciously makes. His intention as described in the master plan and expressed in the videos is to shrink the public space so that human contact is inevitable (Master Plan Inverdan, 2003; Dutch Profiles: Sjoerd Soeters). Space is anonymous and uncomfortable when it is too spacious, but shrunken down it can turn into 'room' (Ibid.). As a room the public space is not subjected to the buildings around it, but it stands on itself (Ibid.). That this reduced space also shows characteristics of limiting public space and privatisation or commodification is not reflected on.

This idea of room is also present in the soon to be build cultural cluster. As described before this building resembles the architecture of the Zaanse houses by cutting out shapes which then creates a unique space filled up with cultural practices from a library to concert spaces and so on. This cultural cluster is supposed to be Zaandam's new 'urban living room' (MVRDV Website). Within the framework *Inverdan* has created, through the ideas of room and the cultural living room kitsch is then not so much being placed in public space, but finds its way back into the personal and private space of a living room. Kitsch is used to make the people feel at home even when they are not. Plus, this feeling at home is made into the logical response. However opposing voices are already heard. The incredibly expensive new 'urban living room' is not needed according to some and has sparked an initiative to demand for a referendum.

Eye of the Beholders

While the rest of Zaandam still looks like the old Zaandam that it was before, slowly the influence of the *Inverdan* project is spreading around the city as also the parts across the water and across the tracks get new developments in the same style. It seems affirmation of the general acceptance and the success of the project. After all it won several prices such as the Arie Keppler prize because of the ability of the project to give the city a 'bustling heart', to 'interpret history anew' and 'give the Zaankanters a redefined self-consciousness' (Jury Report Arie Keppler). The STiB – Steden in Beweging or Cities in Movement – price was awarded to the UDP because it was the most dynamic and lively recent urban planning project (Jury Report STiB). Basically the municipality and the designers can make good use of this acclaim they have gotten throughout the years for the entirety of the project or for specific elements, such as the refurbishing of the C&A shop front or the Inntel Hotel, to reinforce how well their approach to reviving Zaandam's city centre has done.

Most of the discussion surrounding the project is based indeed on mere taste judgements and if the project is kitsch or not. Especially with the continued vision and new announcements of developments in the 'neo-Zaans' style people are however starting to wonder when it will end. In *De Orkaan*, and independent and critical local news outlet, the questioning of the project slowly started to be more outspoken as the formula is just re-used. In the article people wonder if the project will indeed take over the whole city or if the city government will ever realise that enough is enough (De Orkaan,2017). This is perhaps better expressed in the critiques on the Cultuur Cluster.

This latest addition that is supposed to be the icing on the cake to end *Inverdan* with symbolically, has been harshly criticised especially when delays came up again and again. The budget had to be adjusted but cannot be accommodated by the municipality. An initiative came into being to get the city to reconsider through a petition for having to set up a referendum. The Kultuurklutser – a play of words on Cultural Cluster which refers to a saying, 'de kluts kwijt zijn' , that indicates how ridiculous the project is – has been active in opposing the project as it is first of all way too expensive while the cultural sector has already had to deal with budget cuts and when there is plenty of space already available. Apart from being expensive the building would cluster all big cultural institutions of Zaandam precisely in this one area linked to the *Inverdan* project. They think it is neither a good idea to condense culture in one spot, nor to focus any more on the project: Zaandam is not *Inverdan* or the other way around (KultuurKlutser Website). So far the initiative has not reached any successes. Still their case sheds light on quite a few critical urban topics: the way that culture is used as a tool or instrument in projects to achieve certain economic and merchandising goals without really investing in the culture, the lack of democratic principles in urban governance or governing, and so on. In relation to this research it clearly shows the conflicts at play with this totalising project that is slowly taking over a city.

One Meaning – The Singular Narrative

This project in Zaandam was necessary to revitalise the city centre that according to the plan, to the architects and to the inhabitants was not in any great shape. Like typical jargon for urban development projects it relies heavily on language reminding of a body: to revitalise, to make it once more a lively city centre and to give Zaandam a beating heart (Master Plan Inverdan, 2003). Apart from this strong language, the style was an ode to the region, and ode to the place specificity of the project as nowhere else they could claim this history. For inhabitants it thus signifies something to be proud of. For tourist, future residents and businesses it shows a new entertaining area with potential. Its hidden features, already known to the residents, is uncovered to attract these outsiders, and it presented as the logical thing to want: there will be new jobs, economic improvements and the place will look nicer for everyday users too. *Inverdan* gives comfort by reassuring inhabitants they know where they are from, that they are (ironically enough) unique and not just a suburb to Amsterdam. It gives businesses, tourists and visitors comfort through new infrastructures of hotels, big office spaces and cultural hotspots.

The developments in Zaandam have indeed in line with the concept of *Inverdan* and the motto about its treasures, focused on some of the hidden qualities of the city. However in uncovering some of its treasures, it has also been covering up some others. One of the things this stylistically sound and utterly enjoyable architecture is actively extracting from the view is exactly its formulaic properties. After all the way that the project embraces the logic of kitsch or maybe just postmodernism it is becoming much like any UDP project that perhaps

indirectly reinforces the neoliberal paradigm. Slowly but surely the *Inverdan* project has been forming the city's image and the way that it is branded for touristic and other economic purposes. Meanwhile the city has so far mostly accepted new projects in the style of *Inverdan*, while it barely allows for any new developments that do not use the same formula as the main project. It keeps choosing the ones that express exactly the same narrative full of nostalgia and high entertainment value indeed urging inhabitants to find ways to show the enough is enough for example through organising for petitions.

| Labelling Kitsch

So far my research has shown to what degrees themes and topics related to the cultural category of kitsch align with the discourses and the aesthetics of these two projects. What I have however barely mentioned so far is the actual use of the concept of kitsch in criticising, describing or promoting *Skopje 2014* and *Inverdan*. Although at the start of my research I intended to fully focus on this, the balance slowly shifted to the narrative presented by the projects themselves then by the responses and how the label kitsch is used in these. Besides, my observation at the start of my research also seemed quite accurate as the word was often not used with any further exploration.

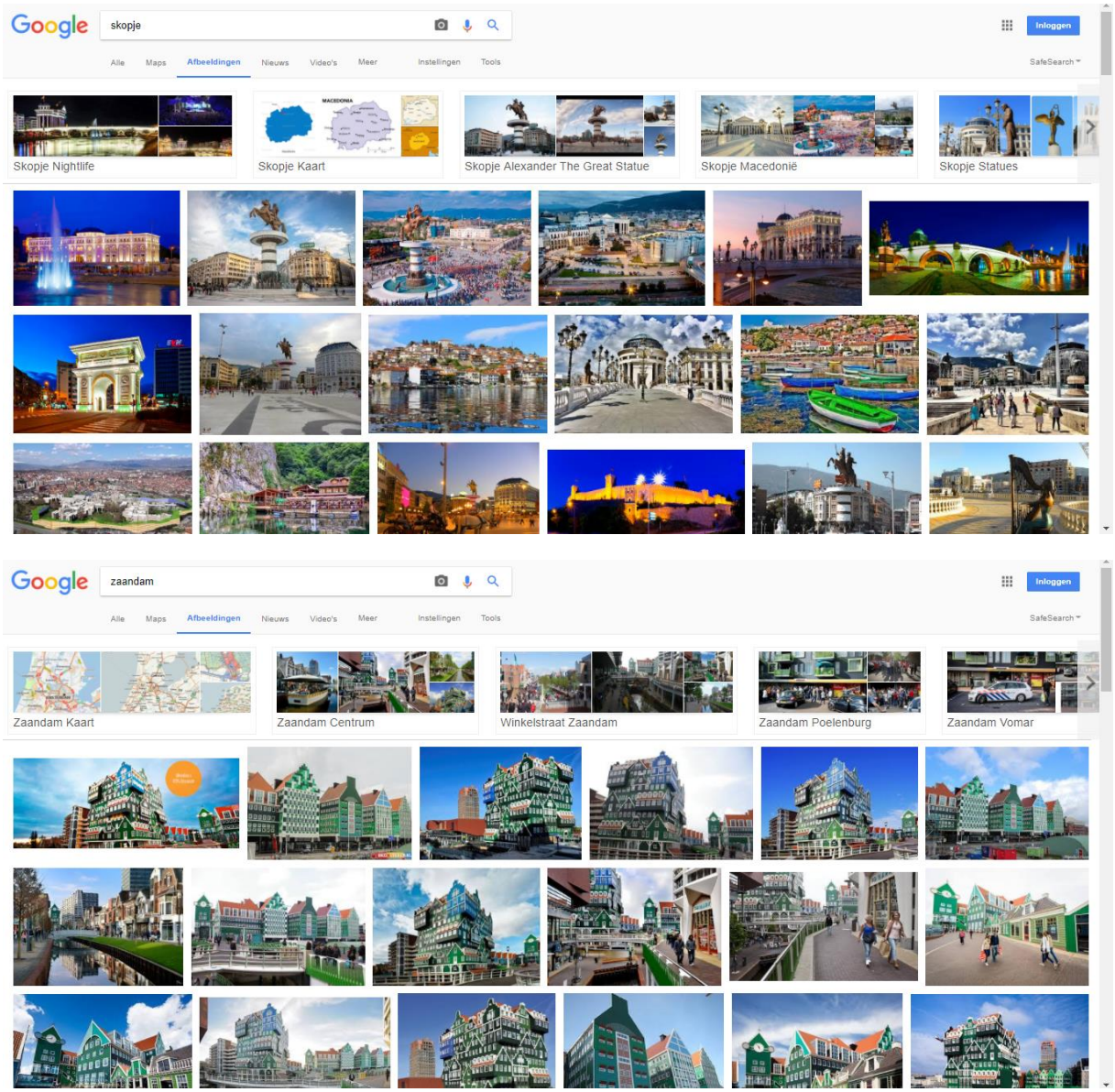
The articles from *The Guardian, Der Spiegel* or the *New York Times* use kitsch right away in the titles as they talk about Skopje respectively as 'the capital of kitsch', the project as a 'kitsch makeover' of the Macedonian city or brace themselves to go 'beyond kitsch' (Gillet, 2015; Mayer, 2013; Crevar, 2016). Although they in the rest of the text for sure touch upon some of the themes and topics related to kitsch, they do not explore more of the cultural category of kitsch and why it would fit in this category and what this would entail. The same counts for other articles that mention kitsch somewhere in the article, often as a quick quote from someone. Although many of them touch on the sensitivities of the project and the complicated context, how the project uses certain ideas of national identity and it has all been done in non-transparent ways, there really is no further delving into the concept of kitsch. Thus they do not actually go beyond kitsch and use the category to its full potential, rather it remains a word to catch people's attentions, especially when used in the title. Ironically enough the word is almost as superficial, or at least used in that way, as the objects that fall under its umbrella.

Zaandam and its urban development project is not as unanimously claimed to be the new city of kitsch in the Netherlands. However there are interesting ways of describing the architecture as 'hotseknots' or as 'laugh-or-I-shoot' architecture which are both very Dutch expressions that do not even mean anything specific but evoke a sense of ridiculous quirkiness (Witman, 2010; Huisman, 2011). There is an obvious difference with Skopje though when looking at these articles. Where Skopje is mentioned to be like theme parks or Las Vegas, it does not get the same connection with postmodernism as *Inverdan* does. It is even related to the theories that speak of going beyond postmodernism as *Inverdan* might be an example of something that is 'superpostmodernist' (Hulsman, 2012). The negative or positive judgement of the urban development project and its characteristic style is also a lot more nuanced.

Either way, in both cases the use of the word kitsch is relying heavily on the concept being known among the readers as there is no definition or explanation. It does seem that most of it relies on it being simply a taste judgement as it is used to indicate the lack of aesthetic value, or as a simple statement from certain people and why it is either not appreciated that much or why it attracts so much attention. Hopefully the former part of my research has actually shown to what extents kitsch can be used to comprehend the structures of urban development projects and these specific cases in their contexts.

Conclusion

For both cases the projects truly have formed new images of the cities. Taking centre stage, blurring any other interpretations and visions, and promoting and branding the cities intensively has resulted in the new taking over the old. Like the parasite or the cannibal that kitsch is often made out to be the projects in Skopje and Zaandam have replaced what connotations there formerly were with 'Skopje' or 'Zaandam', if the places that they recreate even already existed. A quick Google Image search for the cities demonstrates this take over.



Screenshots from a Google Image search for 'Skopje' and 'Zaandam' on August 30 2017. Zaandam shows only pictures of *Inverdan*. Skopje has all kinds of different parts of *Skopje 2014* and only a few of other attractions and tourist hotspots.

All there is to be found on Skopje is now accompanied with photos of Alexander the Great in his fountain or many of the other sculptures and monumental buildings and Zaandam is no longer just the Zaanse Schans, but the Inntel Hotel, city hall and other forms of green regional

architecture. Of course, this is a very superficial testing of the statement. However hopefully this research has already shown how much the narrative presented by the projects has started to take over. It is also difficult to compare the effect within the cities and, in the case of Skopje, within the nation, as the project have evoked such critically different responses. Zaandam can just be considered quirky and perhaps just not so conscious of what exactly the inhabitants want, rather than the tourists and future business. Skopje on the other hand enters a political context that is incredibly charged and to simply define the project as entertaining or enjoyable kitsch would dismiss the conflicts and smooth out the creases as much as the project wants to do.

The similarities lie in the way that it interacts with the capitalism that is so inherent to the concept of kitsch and the neoliberal processes that it accommodates. Kitsch is easy to consume and what it makes of these cities is easily consumable spaces where the practices of tourism, leisure such as shopping and the increased privatisation can effortlessly dominate. It makes the city centres into objects or even brands that are easily marketed and promoted, much like the many souvenirs that are made out of the projects.

Meanwhile the narratives relate the sense of belonging provided by kitsch through sentiments of nostalgia and the feeling of being included to the sense of place as the physical forms express an identity so unique to the specific city, or nation. In both cases this identity functions as comforting in itself, as an antidote to the universalism of globalisation, but also to the insecurities. The stability is however one that is false, either because it is based on forcefully constructed identities, or it is problematic as the force of neoliberalism behind the comfort providing, ontologically sound provided identities, revels through 'chronically unstable geographies' and thus only further re-establishes the insecurities in the current society (Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

Both these cities feel the pressure of having to compete on more than just regional scales and seem to use the formula of spectacle, of entertainment, of kitsch to make sure their cities show up on the mental maps in this globalised world. There is pressure for them to compete, as this is presented as the only logical option within the neoliberal urban planning practices, and they have to do this on a global as much as on the local level. Skopje and Zaandam are not alone in this struggle as many cities have to deal with it. However the forms, the aesthetics and the kitsch of these two projects are not strategies seen in many other places, or at least not on the same scale and density.

Kitsch is supposed to be of the masses, of the people, but if there is something that these projects show is that it in the end perhaps does not concern itself so much with (all) the people that actually inhabit the space. Perhaps only through extensive research with interviews and so on can it be established if the majority is happy with the projects or not, but in the end this is not the point. Especially Skopje demonstrates how the kitsch-narrative silences certain voices in favour of others, how it simplifies the politics and takes conflict, and critical thought out of the urban space. But rather than becoming a space that is post-political, it only fuelled the counter-discourses more. Inverdan is probably tolerated a lot more exactly because the situation has already been devoid of any urgent political significance. Both cases also show how critiques are often actually overtaken by issues of taste and 'beauty' rather than looking at the political problematic stances or on the capitalism at play. This idea of how politics are erased from kitsch and how it relates to the post-political is not something I have been able to delve into, but which I think would be very interesting.

Lastly I want to consider how to deal with these kitsch landscapes. If irony and laughter are the antidote's to kitsch, how can this be translated into responses to the built infrastructure? The Colourful Revolution showed an incredibly powerful protest, that used the materiality in a strong way, but whose aesthetically pleasing visuals took over when it was commercialised. To find alternatives is moreover becoming a pressing question for Skopje with the new government in place. Their successes will partially be based on how they deal with the project that helped the former conservative leading party take a fall and lose the elections. It will be interesting to keep an eye on the Macedonian capital to see how *Skopje 2014* will be dealt with. While the project in Macedonia is good as done Zaandam still continues with the same vision as more and more green, and not the natural kind, pops up throughout the city. Surely at some point the styleme will get old, also literally. Perhaps time will even be the best way of dealing with and uncovering the narratives and myths presented by the project and perhaps this is not even needed in Zaandam's case that now provides simple enjoyment and easy consumerism. Either way these projects, now realised to the full, will have to stand the test of time.

Saul Friedlander once wrote in Salmagundi's publication on its kitsch symposium that 'there is no kitsch which ends with a question' and that 'all kitsch ends with a statement' (as cited in Kulka, 1996: 97). For me this research on kitsch and urban development projects has not at all ended with a statement, as it leaves me only with more questions.

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Any translations from Dutch to English are mine. Quotes from Macedonian are taken from articles in which the authors have translated them into English.

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Annex

| Skopje 2014

What?	By Whom?	For Who?	Why and how analysed?	Short Description
Macedonia Timeless – Skopje 2014 Video	Made for the city, by whom not clear.	As promotion for the citizens, broadcasted on television, and foreigners, sent to foreign press.	Visual analysis	A 6-minute long video that is filmed in Skopje, but overlaid with amateurish CGI statues, monuments and buildings that are projected to be built by 2014. Features triumphal arch reminiscent of Paris, double decker bus like in London, many statues with freeze frames showing their names. Music, Hero's Farewell, as bombastic soundtrack.
Article	Foreign Press, Der Spiegel	For international audiences	Discourse Analysis	**Title:** Europe's Flailing Capital of Kitsch **Paragraph**: 'Historical Kitsch', to describe the style according to architects
Article	Foreign Press, The Guardian	For international audiences	Discourse Analysis	**Title:** How Skopje Became Europe's New Capital of Kitsch **Quote from hotel manager**: 'It's very kitsch, but it's bringing in visitors' Description photo: 'kitsch statues'
Article	Foreign Press, CNN	For international audiences	Discourse Analysis	**Title:** Is Macedonia's capital being turned into a theme park? No mention of kitsch. Uses 'theme park' anology. **Quotable:** "Flags were all over, on people, on cars, on windows. People have replaced their economic problems with a smile and happiness."
Article	Foreign Press, New York Times	For international audiences	Discourse Analysis	**Title:** Beyond Kitsch in Skopje **Quote from Mayor Center Municipality**: "The main conclusion of most of the tourists is that Skopje became Europe's new capital of kitsch," **Ending:** 'Within a week the bedizened emblems of kitsch became vehicles for Pollock-esque, purposeful art as protesters hurled balloons filled with paint on government buildings, the Equestrian Warrior, the Triumphal Arch.'
Article	Foreign Press, BBC	For international audiences	Discourse Analysis	**Title:** The Makeover That's Divided a Nation **Quote:** 'Macedonia has embarked on a major revamp of its capital city, Skopje.' 'It all adds up to the most radical new look since Sandy reinvented herself at the climax of Grease.'

| Inverdan

What?	By Whom?	For Who?	Analysis Method?	Short Description and Notable Findings
Master Plan	Municipality Zaandam & Soeters Van Eldonk Architects	For the municipality officials, for future projects, for possible investors	Discourse Analysis	**Title**: Masterplan Inverdan; 'Discover the Hidden World of Zaanstad' Language that focuses on revitalising, making lively, creating bustling centre, giving the city a beating heart. Focus on 'genius loci', 'room'.
Video	Dutch Profiles	For international audiences	Visual/Discourse Analysis	**Title:** Dutch Profiles: Soeters van Eldonk Architects. Sjoerd Soeters discusses the project *Inverdan*. Mentions the ridiculous architecture of modernism, of the shrinking of public space, the funny references to Dutch and Zaanse culture, the normal people who love this architecture as opposed to people who studied for it. Soeters himself stands out in the regular people crowd with his funky yellow suit and design glasses.
Article	Dutch Press, Trouw	For national audiences	Discourse Analysis	**Title:** Seventy Piled-Up Zaanse Houses (Zeventig Gestapelde Zaanse Huisjes) **Quote:** from architect that is told by people how is design is **'pure kitsch'**
Article	Dutch Press, Volkskrant	For national audiences	Discourse Analysis	**Title:** Quirky Pile of Zaanse Houses (Hotseknotse Stapel Zaanse Pandjes) **Quote**: 'There were moments where I wonderen, can I still handle this, so much Zaanse indentity.' – 'But the pride dominates. And not only for me.' Quotes from Alderman Hans Luiten.
Article	Dutch Press, De Groene Amsterdammer	For national audiences	Discourse Analysis	**Title**: Laugh-or-I-shoot-Architecture (Lach-of-ik-schiet-architectuur) **Quotable:** 'The best-used-by-date is closely tied to the detachable green plastic panels, which is a relief. And yes, as form of citymarketing Inverdan is for sure the best choice.'
Article	Dutch Press, NRC	For national audiences	Discourse Analysis	**Title:** Build in the Ever-Lasting Present (Bouw in het Eeuwige Heden) **Quote**: 'In Zaandam Las Vegas has been united with the channels and the bridges of the traditional Dutch city into a superpostmodernistic and unmistakenable new whole.'
Article	Foreign Press, The Guardian	For international audiences	Discourse Analysis	**Title:** Much of a Dutchness: the Hotel Inntel Zaandam **Quote:** about new forms of neo-traditional building in Dutch town: 'Many are kitsch, but some are wholesome, appropriate and well handled. WAM's hotel,

				however is in a class of its own; it will certainly put Zaandam on the tourist map.'
Jury Report	Arie Keppler Prize	Prize for outstanding projects in the Noord-Holland province	Discourse Analysis	Gave the city a 'bustling heart', 'interpret history anew', 'give the Zaankanters a redefined self-consciousness'. 'The whole city has been woken up.' 'Has been given a contemporary boost.'
Jury Report	STiB	Prize for being most successful in strengthening the region	Discourse Analysis	Bringing back the 'dynamicity' to the region. 'Thorough revalorisation of the area.'