

Field Report

Reinventing Vernacular Traditions to Reveal National Identity: A Case Study of the “Macedonian Village”

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To promote a new sense of national identity, the Republic of Macedonia recently commissioned the design and construction of a “Macedonian Village” as part of a wider “Skopje 2014” project for its capital city. Sourced through a design competition, the village, which has yet to open, seeks to use Macedonian heritage and vernacular architecture to promote tourism. This report reviews the project and critiques the authenticity of its representations. It further interrogates the meaningfulness of such reinventions of tradition as sites for the consumption of instant touristic experiences.

Vernacular heritage includes both physical remnants of the past (i.e., the historic environment in the form of archaeological and architectural sites) as well as nonmaterial aspects of the living past (i.e., intangible heritage as manifested in music, handicrafts, religion, and other rituals and practices). In support of its preservation, authors from a variety of disciplines have noted how such heritage is one of the central, defining aspects of human life, and that it constitutes an important element of people’s identity and sense of place.¹

Implicit in the concept of heritage, however, is the threat that something will be lost unless a conscious effort is made to preserve it. In this regard, scholars typically make a distinction between living culture and heritage, and stress that preservation becomes necessary only when ordinary institutions and cultural practices can no longer guarantee the survival of a site or practice. The mere designation of something as “heritage,” then, seems to indicate its end as a living culture/practice.² According to Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, for example, heritage designation gives an endangered site or practice a second life as an exhibition of itself.³ This transition, however, may obscure contestations between local people, who may still see such sites as part of their living culture, and other actors such as national governments and international experts, who wish to designate them as heritage sites and thus to some extent museumify them.

As this discussion indicates, some of the controversy surrounding heritage designation may originate in differing views and uses of sites and buildings. But it also implies a supposed dichotomy between tangible and intangible heritage. Although different opinions and understandings of these two types of heritage exist, it is important not to draw too strict a line between them. A living culture is not only often manifested through and in buildings (tangible heritage), but it may also be the best guarantee for the preservation of the latter. Preservation movements and an interest in heritage sites thus arise as a result of a (perceived) threat to *both* traditional ways of life and historic buildings.

Interest in the West in preserving rural heritage arose when industrialization and urbanization became a threat to traditional life. Thus, the world's first open-air museum, Skansen, was created in Stockholm in the 1890s in order to collect and preserve vernacular houses from different parts of Sweden. Today, the growing appreciation of traditional architecture and historic villages in China is likewise derived from an increasing awareness of the threat of economic development and modernization.⁴

As a practice, contemporary heritage preservation is heavily dependent on tourism as an economic rationale. And tourism relies on tourist-consumers, a rather unusual type of commodity. In most of its varieties, travel for leisure is valued based on information exchange at the point of sale. This information, usually a combination of linguistic and supporting visual elements, creates, codifies and communicates certain mythical experiences. Whatever medium is used, the language of tourism is one of persuasion and seduction, merging macroeconomic goals with the satisfaction of attributed individual need.⁵

Globalization, the process of growing worldwide interconnectedness and interdependency, has added extra layers of complexity to the way touristic representations are created and circulated. Destinations everywhere are currently adapting to a new worldwide tourism culture, while simultaneously trying to commodify their particular "local distinctiveness."⁶ Thus, while they may promote and sell the packaged experience of so-called "authentic" natural landscapes or "traditional" cultures, what counts as local heritage is increasingly defined by global determinants such as UNESCO's World Heritage List. Interestingly, however, this new global evaluative regime may also be fostering the resurgence of local (and sometimes national) identities, and stimulating competing discourses of natural and cultural heritage — a phenomenon that has been noticed worldwide.⁷

At a time when globalism, consumption and markets are moving the world, efforts to exhibit vernacular environments evince an inherent series of problems. By definition, such environments conflict with present materialism and the global imperative for purchased, instant experience. It is not possible to re-create intangible heritage, its values and experiences, and deliver it on a plate for easy consumption. Such experiences can at best be superficial, based on the momen-

tary purchase of something not even close to the lived experience of vernacular culture.

PRECEDENTS FOR THE "MACEDONIAN VILLAGE"

The use of vernacular architecture for entertainment, leisure and tourism is neither new nor unfamiliar. As mentioned above, one of the earliest examples was the village of Skansen. Located on the island of Djurgården, within the city limits of Stockholm, it was created in 1891 by Artur Hazelius (1833–1901) to illustrate ways of life in different parts of Sweden before the industrial era.⁸ The purpose of Skansen was clear: the nineteenth century had been a period of great change throughout Europe, and rural ways of life were rapidly giving way to industrialized society. As a result, many in Sweden feared the country's traditional customs and occupations might be lost to history.

Skansen featured around 150 houses from all over the country (as well as one structure from Telemark in Norway), which Hazelius had bought, shipped piece by piece to the site, and rebuilt to provide a picture of traditional country life. Only three of the buildings were not original, and these were painstakingly copied from examples he had found. Skansen remains open today and continues to present a range of historic Swedish structures — from the Skogholm Manor house, built in 1680, to sixteenth-century Älvros farmhouses.⁹ The site also contains a zoo that is home to animals native to Scandinavia.

Skansen's purpose — to collect and interpret houses that were products of the past to show how people lived before the industrial era — has since been adopted as a paradigm for open-air museums around the world. It has also become a model of how to use vernacular architecture to create a tourist attraction. Indeed, the re-creation and display of such settings has become a contemporary worldwide phenomenon involving the invention and consumption of tradition in the built environment.¹⁰

Many such projects have been built in Europe and the U.S. In the U.S. for example, Old World Wisconsin opened in 1976 to portray the houses and daily life of nineteenth-century European immigrants for visitors to that state.¹¹ In Asia, examples include Namsangol Hanok Village in Seoul, which features five restored traditional Korean houses and a pavilion. Located among tall buildings, its structures are intended to represent traditional houses of the Joseon Dynasty and showcase the living conditions of various social classes, from peasants to the king.¹² Another example is the Tono Furusato Village in Japan, where a reconstructed traditional farming village is intended to arouse nostalgia among Japanese visitors and offer a novel experience for foreigners. Many of its buildings are designated as national tangible cultural properties.¹³

Likewise, Ning Wang has argued that Beijing's old *hutong* districts could be an important cultural resource for tourism development. He suggested that vernacular house

tourism might help communicate local cultural identity to visitors, reduce the negative impact of modernization upon local traditions and traditional styles of houses, and satisfy tourists' demands for experiencing greater authenticity.¹⁴

Such "traditional villages" follow a similar concept, whereby vernacular architectural scenery creates a stage for the consumption of a more general cultural atmosphere. The activities offered are typically the same: visitors to such villages may taste traditional cuisine and experience displays of traditional arts and crafts, as supposed representations of local intangible vernacular heritage.

Almost all such villages are composed of already-existing or reconstructed structures. As mentioned, the buildings at Skansen were moved there from other sites across the country, and the examples cited from Asia and the U.S. are generally based on reconstructions of existing vernacular houses. None of these sites uses newly designed structures to present old, traditional values. In this regard, the "Macedonian Village" that is the topic of this report is an exception because it features entirely new structures. Its closest parallel (in purpose if not in scale), therefore, may be Taman Mini in Indonesia — another state project intended to identify, manufacture and mediate tradition to strengthen a sense of national identity. Nevertheless, the intent of the Macedonian Village to create a tourist experience premised on the consumption of a re-created vernacular setting mirrors most other aspects of the world phenomenon.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MACEDONIAN VERNACULAR HOUSES

The impact of the physical environment is quite obvious in the Macedonian rural landscape. Due to the uneven topography, village dwellings were usually scattered, with streets developing in a natural way and opening onto a single main road. A church was usually located on this road somewhere in the middle of the village. And because of a lack of infrastructure, old villages were usually supplied with drinking water from a common, central fountain (*çeşme, чешма*), fed by pipes from nearby springs.

The spatial development of the Macedonian village has its roots in Ottoman concepts, including the institution of the *mahalle* (quarter). A *mahalle* constituted a single, physically compact social unity, a compartment of a village or city; and the division of a town into *mahalles* generally followed the ethnic origin or religion of its inhabitants. As a functional center, each *mahalle* was defined by social character rather than spatial order.¹⁵ Typically, the physical shape of a village consisted of an organic accumulation of *mahalles*. The appearance of individual houses was thus influenced both by the formation of *mahalles*, the organic disposition of streets, and the morphology of the terrain.

The formal quality of streets in a typical Macedonian village was derived from a dwelling form that directly reflected

family life. These unimposing, modest houses had informal, asymmetrical floor plans dictated by their siting on the terrain and location on plots of land that also contained small gardens. This often caused house plans to encroach on the street, thus conditioning its architecture.

In typological terms, the Macedonian house started as a single space, a living room and stable under one roof. As they grew in size, however, houses developed historically more complex ground-floor plans, but also began to rise to two and sometimes three floors. Ground-floor walls were usually made of stone, while upper floors might employ lighter, wood construction (*bondruk*). In houses with multiple floors, spaces at ground level might be used for stables, storage cellars, and sometimes a covered porch. Their upper floors contained a number of separate rooms, including the so-called "house" (or today's living room, incorporating the kitchen) and a multipurpose balcony (*chardak*). Stairs provided an internal connection between levels (FIG. 1).

Due to the climate, the Macedonian house needed to provide both a winter dwelling, with a massive ground floor constructed of stone, and a summer dwelling on the upper floors, made of lighter wooden construction. The entire site of a fully developed house might consist of a *poton*, which combined a cellar, woodshed and stable; a courtyard enclosing the summer kitchen; a ground floor or mezzanine with a winter kitchen and living room; and an upper floor where summer life (including sleeping rooms) was organized around the *chardak*.¹⁶ This last space was generally an upper porch that was open on at least one side, and that sometimes extended into a *tronj*, or open terrace.

As an architectural element, the *chardak* is of great importance in the Macedonian vernacular. Its origins are deeply rooted in the Turkish *hayat* house.¹⁷ And although it is present in all Macedonian vernacular houses, its position and structure may vary considerably from region to region depending on the climate. Its general character does, however, allow the definition of several broad types of houses: those with an open *chardak* (terrace); those with a semi-closed (semi-open) *chardak*; and those with a closed *chardak* (FIG. 2). The last type was specific to mountain villages.¹⁸

Another type of dwelling, in regions with a Muslim population, was the double house, the so-called *bratska kukja*.¹⁹ Such fraternal houses were designed with two or more identical functional units. Although initially specific to Muslims, this house type was later adopted by wealthier Christians. However, when it was used by this population, it underwent interior adaptations related to religion.

Unlike houses in valley settlements, houses in mountain areas were almost always placed on steep terrain, with their back walls dug into the hillside. To shield residents against the harsh weather, the walls of the upper floors might be made of stone combined with the more typical wooden construction. Across regions in Macedonia the typological variety of architectural forms was also dependent on the po-

FIGURE 1. Historical development of floor plans in the houses of rural Macedonia. Source: author's archive, 1998.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE VILLAGE HOUSE FLOOR PLAN

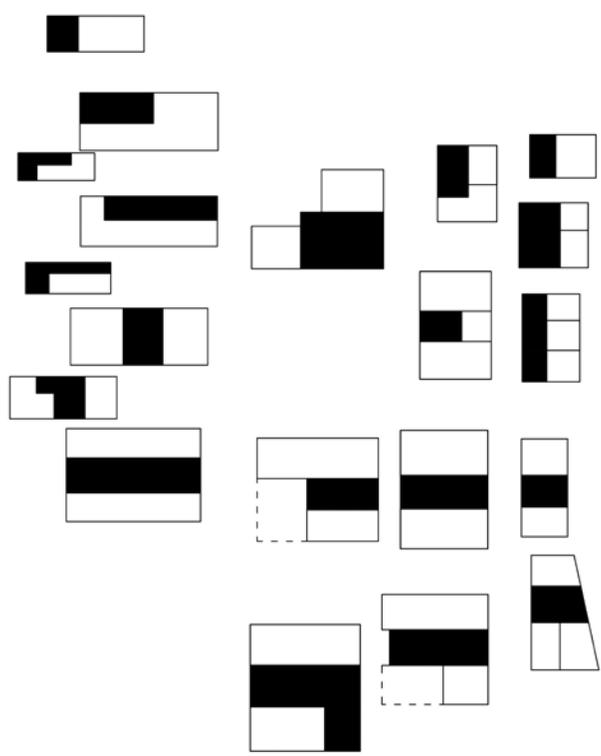
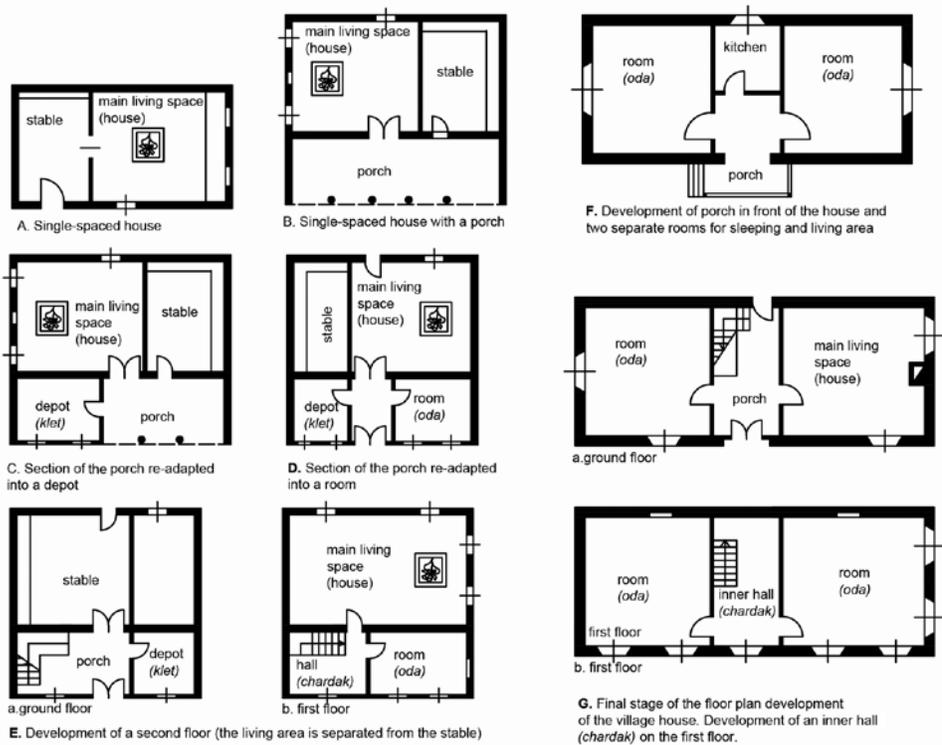


FIGURE 2. Position of the chardak in the Macedonian vernacular house. Based on: D. Grabrijan, Macedonian House (Skopje: Mislja, 1986).



FIGURE 3. The “Macedonian Village” under construction. Source: author’s archive, 2013.

sitioning of buildings in relation to each other, and to their relative development in horizontal or vertical terms as a result of site constraints.

THE “MACEDONIAN VILLAGE”: AN INTRODUCTION

The “Macedonian Village,” already built and soon to be opened, began as an urban design proposal for a tourist site on the slopes of Vodno mountain overlooking the city of Skopje (FIG. 3). The site itself, adjacent to the existing village of Nerezi, faces north to the city, and is located across from one of the oldest Byzantine monasteries in the country, and from the church of Saint Panteleimon, which dates to 1164. As mentioned, the village consists entirely of new construction, with each house designed to represent a typical traditional house from regions across the Republic of Macedonia.

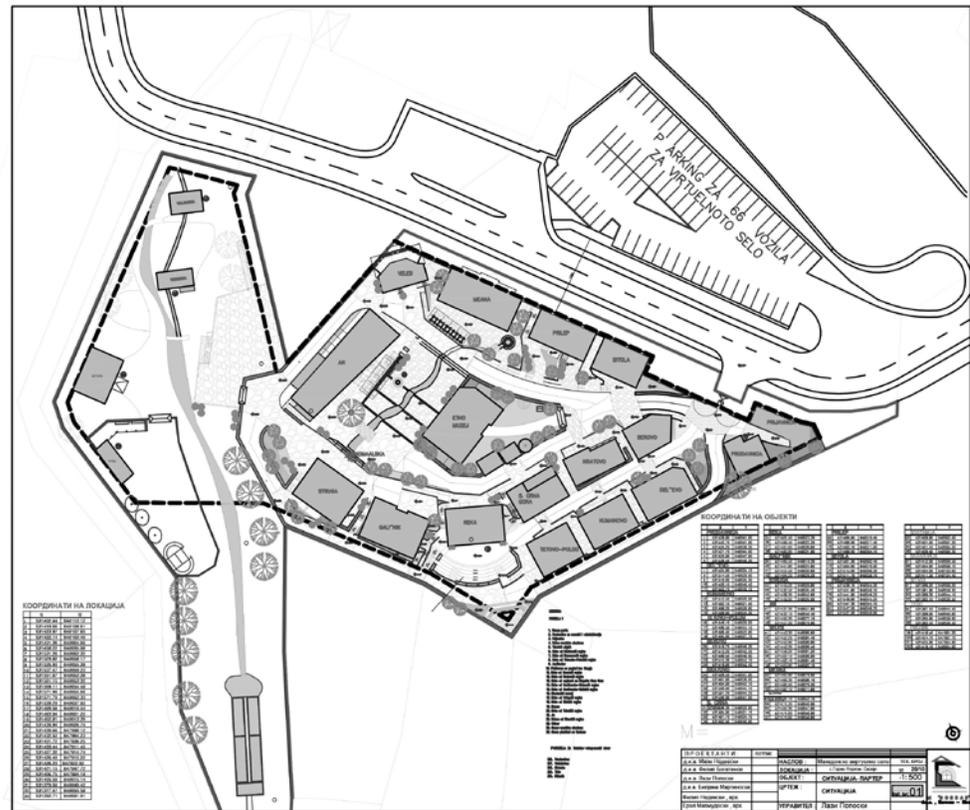
The goal of the project was to showcase a collection of Macedonia’s specific vernacular architectures in a single newly created space that would serve as an open-air museum (FIG. 4). Each of these “authentic” houses would further showcase a traditional craft, specific to its region. For example, the house representing the town of Bitola would highlight pottery-making. A potter would be employed on site to produce clay products, and visitors would be offered a chance to make their own (they would, of course, also be encouraged to buy clay products as souvenirs). Likewise, in the house from the region of Kratovo, there would be a wine cellar, because in the preindustrial era the town was famous for its wine — even though the most famous wine-making region today is Tikvesh (Тиквеш, Tikveš).

The upper floors of each “village” house, meanwhile, were designed as apartments for overnight stays by guests. A total of 51 rooms are included in the complex, which also includes an inn and a *meana* (a term derived from the Turkish word *meyhane*, meaning a “pub,” which was readapted and used in Ottoman Macedonia to refer to a restaurant). Two smaller restaurants are also included, in the Kumanovo and Struga houses, where traditional meals will also be available. Finally, the project includes souvenir shops and an ethnological museum.²⁰

As a tourist site, the village and its program rely, on the one hand, on allusion to a “tradition” of real rural life. Yet, on the other, tradition’s physical manifestation has been reconfigured according to a preset program to combine houses from a variety of regions. This has been accomplished by ensuring that individual structures are just generically traditional enough that they still provide the sense of “local life.” The village thus exploits the heritage of a variety of Macedonian regions to construct an amalgamation of multiple dwelling traditions in a single location.

The decision as to which regions to represent in the project was ultimately made by government officials. The Republic of Macedonia encompasses a number of geographic regions where different types of houses can be found. And while rural areas are considered to be where most vernacular houses came from, traditional architecture can also be found in some of these regions’ bigger towns. Interestingly, however, the houses and regions presented are not fully representative of all areas of Macedonia. They fail to represent architecture from some of the country’s most significant traditional areas — specifically, the iconic towns of Ohrid and Krushevo (Крушево, Kruševo).

FIGURE 4. The layout of the new village. Source: Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Macedonia. Reprinted by permission



The sections that follow will assess several of the specific houses presented in the Macedonian Village. Overall, the project represents houses from the regions of Berovo, Kratovo, Skopska Crna Gora, Reka, Galicnik, Struga, Tetovo-Polog, Kumanovo, and Delchevo (Делчево), and from the towns of Bitola, Veles and Prilep. The houses from these regions all have individual characteristics and differences. But it is also important to point out that vernacular settlements in Macedonia belong to two important subgroups: mountain vernacular houses and traditional Macedonian houses of the valleys.

THE REKA REGION AND THE VILLAGE OF GALICNIK

The region of Reka lies in the Western part of Macedonia and may be divided into several smaller regions: Gorna Reka, Dolna Reka, Golema Reka, Mala Reka, and Mijachija. Two structures in the village claim to present designs from the area: a generic regional house and a house that is claimed to represent the village of Galicnik. Interestingly, Galicnik was selected as a representative village even though, from the perspective of vernacular heritage, this area contains other perhaps more notable villages, such as Lazaropole, Gari, and Tresonche.

Even though the houses in this region may differ from village to village, they have some typical characteristics by which it is easy to determine their origin. This is a moun-

tainous area, where some villages are covered with snow until early summer, and typical structures had to protect residents from a severe mountain climate (FIG. 5). In terms of layout, houses from the Reka region, and from the mountain of Bitra where the village of Galicnik is located, were therefore generally articulated upward through multiple stories, with entrances to grade at each level (FIG. 6). Yet while the design for the house presented as typical of Galicnik was modeled from an actual structure that still exists in the village, a com-

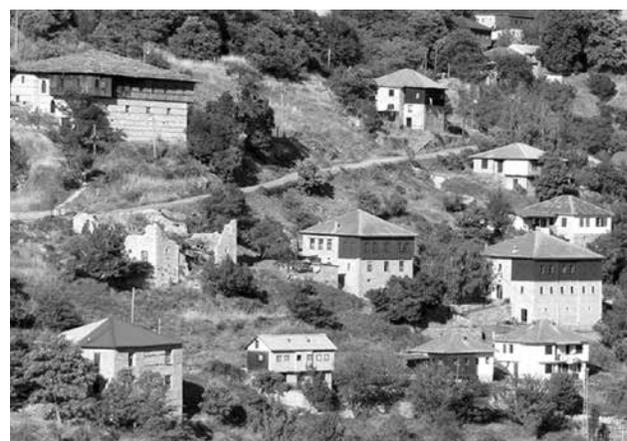


FIGURE 5. Village of Galicnik. Source: author's archive.

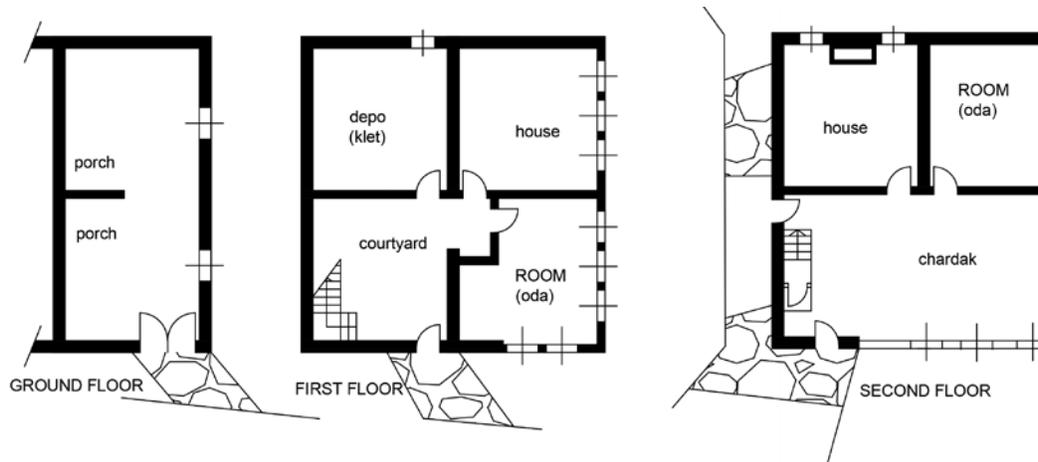


FIGURE 6.
Typical floor plan of the
vernacular house from
the village of Galicnik.
Source: author's archive.

parison of photos reveals differences between it and the original that are more than obvious (FIGS. 7, 8).

Leaving aside questions of scale and proportion (which were not considered), the principal difficulty in the design of the replica is the nature of its so-called *chardak*. This is the open wood-framed area that occupies a large part of the upper (third) level (REFER TO FIG. 8). The *chardak* in houses of Galicnik, and throughout the nearby Mijaks region, are always closed, reflecting the area's harsh climate, with strong winds and cold winters. What has happened here, however, is that the *chardak* is completely open — something that would never occur in any vernacular house of this region.

Other problems with the replica include its siting on artificially sloped terrain, the distorted proportions of various spaces in the plan, and the inappropriate distribution of internal space (FIG. 9A, B). This last concern indicates how the layout of space in the replica differs from actual vernacular practice. Mountain houses typically feature elongated floor plans, with the longer axis running parallel to the contour of the slope, a practice that allows multiple entrances from grade at various levels. The Galicnik house presents a mixture of spaces that hardly reflects a typical village house (or even one of the region). In its interpretation of vernacular "qualities," it appears that what is most important is its facade — as if the skin were all that mattered.

The house presented as typical of general rural conditions in the Reka region is likewise a combination of architectural elements, probably derived from structures in the Dolna Reka subregion. However, its interior offers little sense for traditional vernacular experience because it has been almost entirely adapted for tourist needs and uses (FIGS. 10, 11). Like all the houses of the Macedonian Village, its upper floors have been divided into spaces offering only sleeping accommodations, while cooking and eating areas are provided only in the nearby inn and *meana*.

Like the Galicnik house, the designers of the Reka house thus seem to have attempted to replicate the "vernacular" characteristics of the region by working only on its facade.

One immediately notices that the *chardak* here too has been left open to provide guests with a welcoming open view. This would never have been the case in a traditional house of the Reka region. And, in this case, the designers didn't even pretend to build a replica of an existing structure. A totally different entity than might have been derived from a study of actual practices in the region, the Reka house caters entirely to the needs of tourist-consumers behind a veneer of traditional materials.

THE VELES, PRILEP, AND BITOLA REGIONS

In addition to such supposedly rural structures, the Macedonian Village also contains houses illustrating urban vernacular traditions.²¹ Specifically, it includes houses that purport to represent the towns of Veles, Prilep and Bitola.

The town of Veles is located in the mid-north of the country, on both banks of the river Vardar. It has its own specific architecture, with its houses adapted to the terrain, which includes high hills that make solid foundation walls inevitable (FIGS. 12, 13).

The replica of a Veles house in the village is a combination of structural and material elements sourced from original examples (FIGS. 14, 15). The final result, however, largely resembles the other houses that surround it in the village complex. There are few specifics that mark it as distinct to the town of Veles.

One reason becomes evident in analyzing its plan. Despite the fact that the designers set it on an artificial slope to re-create the terrain of the town, its ground floor accommodates a spatial geometry that would never appear in any vernacular structure in Macedonia. This plan was clearly created to accommodate guests, and no other function. No attempt has been made to replicate the interior layout of a typical town house, or even provide a sense of the life that might be lived there.

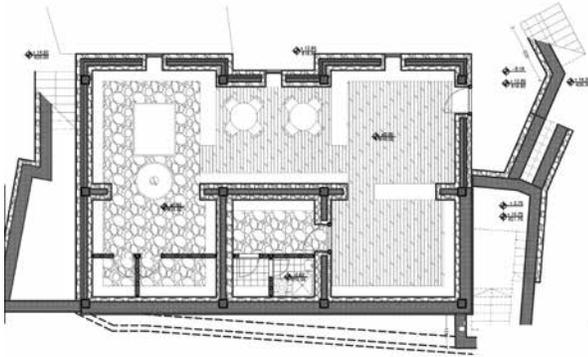
The towns of Prilep and Bitola lie in the south of the country on the flat agricultural land of the Pelagoniya plain.



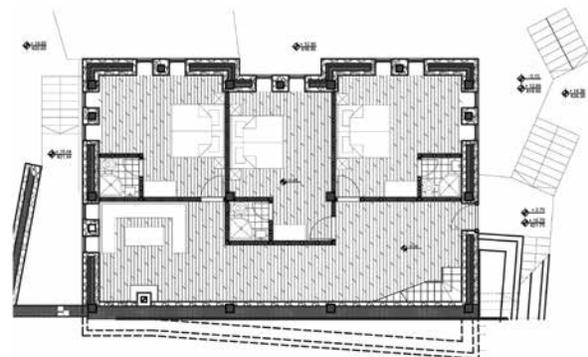
FIGURE 7. House in the village of Galicnik. Source: author's archive.



FIGURE 8. South facade of the "Galichka" house in the Macedonian Village. Source: author's archive, 2014.



9A. GROUND FLOOR



9B. FIRST FLOOR

FIGURE 9. Ground- and first-floor plans of the "Galichka house" in the Macedonian Village. Source: Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Macedonia. Reprinted by permission.



FIGURE 10. The Reka house in the Macedonian Village. Source: author's archive, 2014.

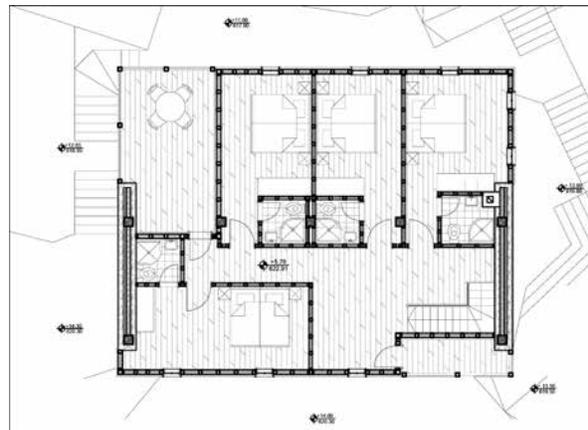


FIGURE 11. Top-floor plan of the "Reka house" in the Macedonian Village. Source: Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Macedonia. Reprinted by permission.



FIGURE 12. House of Kocho Racin, Veles. Source: V. Brangolica, Trimaks Skopje. Reprinted by permission.

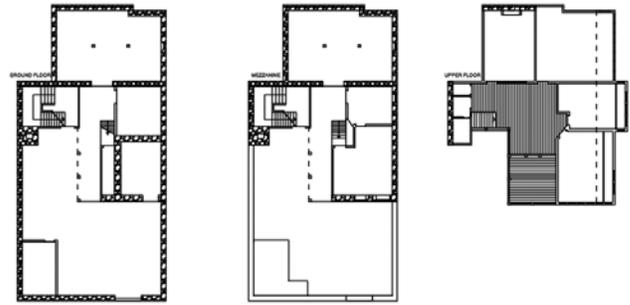


FIGURE 13. Typical floor plan of a Veles house. Based on: Grabrijan, Macedonian House.

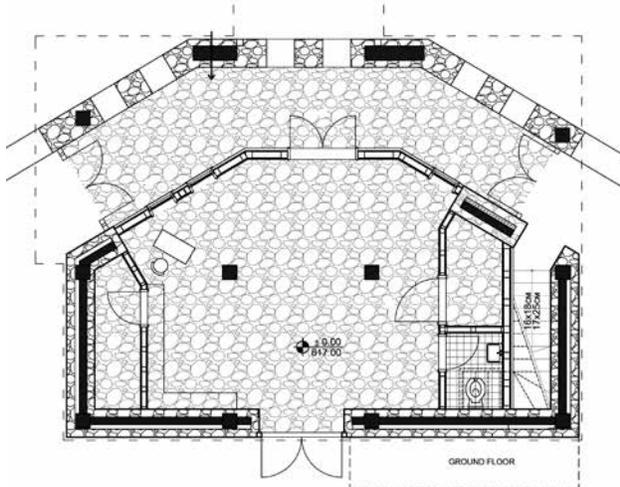


FIGURE 14. Ground-floor plan of the "Veleshka" house in the Macedonian Village. Source: Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Macedonia. Reprinted by permission.



FIGURE 15. The "Veleshka" house in the Macedonian Village. Source: author's archive.

In general, the houses from this region typify Macedonian valley dwellings, which generally have only two floors. Their exterior walls are mostly built of stone, while the *chardak* sometimes occupies half the upper floor, or may extend out over the front entrance door.

The most rich and characteristic area for vernacular settlements in Prilep is the Mariovo region, located in the dry, rocky hills south of the town proper. Even though some attention has been paid to the materials out of which the house intended to represent this region at the Macedonian Village is made, its overall appearance and proportions lack any distinguishing features (FIG. 16). And while they may attempt to catch the spirit of the region, the wooden decorations on its rear facade are not typical at all of the vernacular houses from the region. Indeed, the Prilep house could easily be mistaken for one from another region.²²

The same can be said of the house intended to represent the Bitola region (FIG. 17). It offers a strange mix of styles that do not resemble or replicate any specifics of the traditional houses there.

THE BEROVO, KRATOVO AND DELCHEVO REGIONS

Adjacent to another group of houses in the Macedonian Village that claim to represent the far eastern regions of the country is a group of houses derived from precedents in the region of Maleseviija (Малешевија). The houses here were designed to reflect the "typical" vernacular styles of houses in villages around the towns of Berovo, Kratovo and Delchevo.

Kratovo is a small, picturesque town that is one of the region's living museums. Today it retains many characteristics



FIGURE 16. The back facade of the Prilep house. Source: author's archive, 2014.

of past times. Its bridges, in particular, typify its having been constructed by old masters. Vernacular dwellings in these areas are different from those in high mountain regions, because the presence of a more moderate climate has led to a more open second-floor plan (FIG. 18). Very often these houses feature bay windows (*cumba*) and semi-open *chardaks*. As represented by the design in the Macedonian Village, however, the Kratovo house is again very confusing, differing markedly from what can actually be seen in the villages of the Malesheviya region (FIG. 19).

As a general rule, the ground floors of vernacular houses in Macedonia follow the morphology of the terrain — a characteristic that becomes especially pronounced in hilly or mountainous regions. However, the need to use the buildings of the Macedonian Village for tourist accommodations means that the typical traditional floor plan has been completely abandoned. The “vernacular” value of the building is therefore largely treated through the facade.

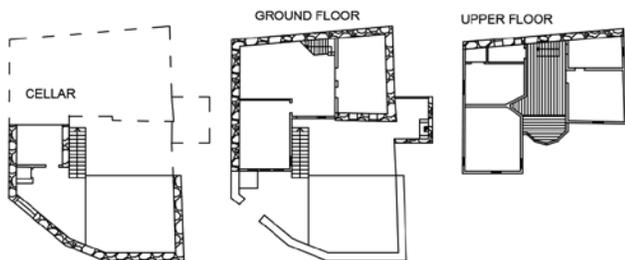


FIGURE 18. Floor plan of a house in Kratovo. Based on: Grabrijan, Macedonian House.



FIGURE 17. The entrance view of the house representing the Bitola region. Source: author's archive, 2014.

Traditionally, adaptation to the terrain was the most important factor influencing the development of individual floor plans and the relationship between levels in a multistory structure. But in the cases of houses supposed to represent these regions, the floor plans have clearly been born and developed to adapt the traditional house to a new function.

THE STRUGA REGION

The town of Struga lies on the shore of lake Ohrid in the southeast of Macedonia. As a municipality, it extends north to the region of Debar and the nearby Reka region. Even though the villages in this area occupy a hilly geography, their architecture differs significantly from those of the Reka region. In particular, the houses here are mostly built in stone and wood and never exceed two stories.



FIGURE 19. Kratovo house in the Macedonian Village. Source: author's archive, 2014.



FIGURE 20. *The Struga house built in the Macedonian Village.*
Source: author's archive.

The typical vernacular house in the Struga region is two stories high with a wooden *chardak* occupying one half of the upper floor. By contrast, the house in the Macedonian Village identified as presenting the region includes an extremely uncommon balcony structure (FIG. 20). As such, the house differs totally from what one might expect to see if one visited the region. The only logical conclusion is that, as in the case of the Galicnik house, one single existing house was used to represent the architecture of all vernacular structures in the Struga region.

Beyond this anomaly, the floor plan of the house representing the region exhibits the same lack of concern for the connection between tangible and intangible value within a vernacular tradition that one can see in many of the other houses in the village. The plan of this house has instead been redesigned to facilitate its new function as a tourist accommodation.

REINVENTING TRADITION: A QUESTION OF (FALSE) PREMISES

The need to reconstruct (or as in the case of Macedonia, re-establish) a sense of national identity is a recurring dilemma today. In many cases the problem originates with political units formed as nations in the post-World War II era that were never homogeneous entities with common cultures.²³ Once independence was achieved, the glue that bound these nations together frequently dissolved. The decay of former socialist regimes created further problems of national and communal difference.²⁴

Macedonian national identity was marginalized for centuries. However, following the fall of the Federative Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991, Macedonians were finally able to form

an independent country. And after centuries of subtle suppression, they have now been allowed to explore aspects of their own traditions, history and heritage. In the capital city of Skopje particularly, this has involved a search back through architectural and urban form to discover neglected and forgotten roots.

An example of the state role in identifying, manufacturing and mediating tradition, the Macedonian Village thus embodies ideas of culture, tradition, identity and history intended to validate Macedonian nationhood. As with many similar developments, it is further intended to put Macedonia on the world tourist destination map. But, in this case, the "typical" structures exhibited are also supposed to provide souvenir shops, restaurants, overnight accommodation for tourists, and an ethnological museum. The question that must be asked by architectural historians (and everyone else) is: Is it possible to create such an unnatural fusion, place it in a natural surrounding, and expect it to work?

Numerous examples exist of vernacular architecture being used to promote the culture and traditions of a region or nation. But most employ already existing traditional houses, which are either relocated to a common site or restored in place. The process therefore not only involves the preservation of exteriors, but also of interiors as a way to represent the life of their former inhabitants. In other words, these sites make an effort to present both tangible and intangible cultural values. Even Taman Mini, the Indonesian heritage site referred to earlier, which is also composed of completely new structures, takes great care to present such intangible aspects of tradition.

The houses presented in this study are not only newly built, but primarily designed to accommodate visitors. Their interiors thus reflect tourist-consumer needs more than the imperative to produce the feeling of life before industrialization. Furthermore, the houses are designed as amalgams of various houses in each region, sometimes combining elements from houses in large towns with those from more rural settings. The "vernacular" is thus only faithfully reproduced in their skins — even though modifications and adaptations are present there too.

As an open-air museum where culture and tradition are literally manufactured for tourist consumption, the Macedonian Village reflects a government effort to use history and tradition to advance a sense of national identity. But this effort is potentially flawed by its failure to deliver the desired sense of authenticity. The past cannot be made present through a simple amalgamation of vernacular architectural elements. To do so would be to suggest that Macedonian heritage consists of little more than material structure — that it never actually provided a cradle for more intangible qualities.

The desire to preserve distinctive ways of life — past and present, tangible and intangible — is part of the emerging cultural conservation movement. Yet, because tangible manifestations of heritage are far more quantifiable and manage-

able, the effort here seems to focus only on the “conservation” of appearances. This presents a challenge to the continuity and sustainability of local traditions. If the past is to be re-created, it should be done to the fullest extent.

Macedonian vernacular architecture does indeed promote admirable values of simplicity and spirit, clarity and richness. The development of the *chardak*, in particular, exemplifies the wonder of light and the genius of local design. Yet the design of the Macedonian Village exemplifies a total absence of these values. If the goal was to present traditional crafts, meals and art, then the architects may have intended for these qualities to be experienced through activities in its various structures. But from the layout and character of its structures alone it is not clear what values of Macedonian village life it is promoting.

Seen in a more cynical light, perhaps this “village” offers as much of the vernacular as the average tourist needs. But if a scholar or someone actually interested in Macedonian vernacular traditions were to visit, they might be disappointed. For the truly inquisitive, this site might at best serve as a starting point, providing basic information about real territories and towns that can still be visited to experience vernacular tradition.

From its choice of representative structures, it might further be assumed that the project intended to promote the architecture of the country’s less well-known regions. As mentioned, the design fails to represent some of Macedonia’s most important traditional sites, such as the towns of Ohrid and Krushevo. In 1979, UNESCO inscribed Ohrid Lake on the World Heritage List under natural criteria III. And in 1980 this listing was extended to include the cultural and historical area, and cultural criteria I, III, and IV were added.²⁵ It is also unclear why the characteristics of buildings in the town of Krushevo, which has an equally significant vernacular heritage, were not presented in the project.

The Republic of Macedonia is a very small country, and yet it has a rich vernacular tradition.²⁶ Architects should certainly be concerned with respecting this and working to prevent it from disappearing. But the decision to design and build a traditional, vernacular village from scratch was perhaps based on a false premises. Consider, for example, what might be the result if such an idea were actually to succeed. What would happen to all the actual exceptional traditional settlements if there were no longer a need to visit them because they could all be replicated at one site? Not only would this mean that tourists would no longer be encouraged to

appreciate vernacular architecture and traditional life in its natural setting, but it would represent a step toward the loss of those traditional sites altogether.

Inherited vernacular tradition should be a source of inspiration in establishing the guiding principles for new building in Macedonia. Design principles such as respect for nature and its power, human treatment of space, qualities of light, the equilibrium of order and disorder, and the creation of a human-centered architecture appeal to everyone. Le Corbusier once found inspiration in the vernacular and wrote a whole new chapter in the history of world architecture. It should be possible to follow this example, not by seeking to reinvent something that already exists, but by studying real instances of rich culture and vernacular tradition.

In order to examine how traditions are manifested in space and time it is important to consider which versions, particularities or specificities of tradition emerge and are subsequently anchored in specific places. Why reinvent tradition at an open-air museum when it is still possible to experience cultural heritage in actual villages throughout the country? What is the need to reinvent something artificial when traditional sites, with all their tangible and intangible value, still exist? The reinvention of tradition through the Macedonian Village raises a question of values. Is the nation actually interested in vernacular traditions, or merely miming heritage to revive a repressed national identity? Macedonian architectural tradition is very much present today. Are designers risking its future by reinventing it at such exhibition sites?

Despite how one might judge its formal features — as authentic or appropriative, traditional or fake — the Macedonian Village raises real questions about what qualifies as vernacular in today’s world. Projects like it force a reevaluation of how we conceive of tradition — its role in the production of environments, its relative efficacy of transmission, and its potential demise in the face of the globalization. Are we reaching a point where we are “putting an end to tradition” with examples like these? Or does the so-called end of tradition entail less the death of tradition itself than of our conception of it as a repository of authentic ideas to be handed down or preserved?²⁷

Only time will tell if this, one of the Macedonian government’s bigger investments, will be justified. At the moment, however, architectural scholars in Macedonia are divided on the whole “Skopje 2014” project — and the Macedonian Village as part of it.

REFERENCE NOTES

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26. Macedonia has a land area of 25,713 sq.km. (9,928 sq.mi.).
27. AlSayyad, "The End of Tradition, or the Tradition of Endings?" p.12.