

Transcript from: "Arno.mk Podcast in English: Episode 01 – Urban Decay and Resistance, Graffiti in Skopjanka Mall"

John: “All right, so picture this with me: you wander into what seems like a totally normal shopping mall, you know, expecting the usual—bright lights, crowded shops, that kind of thing. But instead of the polished storefronts, you’re hit with these walls. Walls totally covered, like completely plastered, in layer after layer of graffiti.”

Sarah: “Oh, wow.”

John: “And I mean, we’re not just talking about a little tagging here and there. This is like the soul of Skopje speaking to you through spray paint. Each mark, each tag, is like a little whisper from the city’s past. And that’s what we’re diving into in this deep dive.”

Sarah: “Interesting.”

John: “We’re looking at excerpts from "Graffiti in a Post-Socialist Shopping Center in Skopje". It’s a piece of writing that takes the Skopje Shopping Center’s graffiti and uses it as a way to understand the city itself, like a reflection.”

Sarah: “Oh, that’s cool.”

John: “And here’s the thing—this isn’t some stuffy academic paper or anything like that. It’s really personal. It was written by someone who basically grew up in this mall, practically lived there as a teenager. And now, they’re coming back to it after some time has passed, and it’s different. You know, like, everything’s changed. All those faded band names and old slogans on the walls—it’s like they take on a whole other level of meaning, you know what I mean?”

Sarah: “Right. It’s kind of like when your family drags out those dusty old photo albums for the holidays.”

John: “Yeah, yeah! Full of, like, haircuts we’d rather forget, right? But also this weirdly powerful sense of nostalgia.”

Sarah: “Oh, totally.”

John: “You know what I find fascinating? It’s how this person’s story—their personal journey—ties into the bigger story of Skopje itself. Like, the mall is built on a spot with this crazy rich history. We’re talking about the neighborhoods of Ovče Pole and Aerodrom.”

Sarah: “Oh yeah, now that you mention it, those names ring a bell from the text. What’s the deal with those places?”

John: “Okay, so get this: this area used to be a military airfield, like a seriously important spot right outside Skopje.”

Sarah: “Wow.”

John: “Then, 1963—boom! The earthquake hits.”

Sarah: “Right. Devastation.”

John: “And that airfield, which used to represent military strength, gets transformed into this huge tent city—a refuge for the thousands who lost their homes. They called it ‘Ostrovo.’”

Sarah: “So, hold on. We’re talking about a place that went from military power to a symbol of resilience?”

John: “Mhm. And now, it’s a graffiti-covered shopping mall.”

Sarah: “Exactly. And there’s so much more to uncover here. Wait till we dig into the actual messages on these walls—the hopes, the anxieties, all scrawled in spray paint. You’ll see how those layers of history weave together with the Skopje of today.”

John: “It’s wild, right? Like, this whole shopping mall—it was always meant to be this place of contradictions.”

Sarah: “Yeah, built on this foundation of hope after the earthquake, rebuilding, all of that.”

John: “Yeah, but now, the way the author describes it, it’s like you walk in, and the first thing you see is casinos and loan ads everywhere.”

Sarah: “Wow, kind of a far cry from those early days.”

John: “Oh yeah. You know, there’s this one part in the text that really stuck with me. The author talks about walking past those glitzy casinos right at the entrance, but then, as you go deeper into the mall, you find all these empty shops—abandoned, ghosts of businesses past. It’s kind of eerie, actually.”

Sarah: “Yeah, I can see that. It really is like this powerful metaphor. The casinos, the empty shops—it mirrors what’s going on in Macedonia today, you know?”

John: “Yeah, like on one hand, you have these pockets of progress, economic growth, all that. But then there’s this other side—this uncertainty, a feeling of trying to hold on to the past.”

Sarah: “And that’s what makes the graffiti even more meaningful. It’s like we were talking about that whole nostalgia thing earlier, but it’s deeper than that. Each tag, each little message, even those inside jokes scribbled on the wall—the ones only those teenagers understood—they capture something specific about that time.”

John: “Yeah, it made me think of this one line in “Graffiti in a Post-Socialist Shopping Center in Skopje. The author mentions this music store—Pop Top.”

Sarah: “Oh yeah, it was obviously the place to be back in the day, like the heart of the mall.”

John: “Do you remember those kinds of places? The stores that were more than just stores?”

Sarah: “Totally. And for the author, it sounds like Pop Top was a tangible link to their younger self. They talk about going there every week, digging through the cassette tapes.”

John: “Cassette tapes! Anyone listening who’s under 25 is probably like, ‘What’s a cassette tape?’”

Sarah: “Right. And it got me thinking, how many of those places have we seen just disappear?”

John: “Yeah, and it’s not just about a music store closing. It’s about the little pieces of ourselves that we lose when those places are gone. It’s that feeling of time passing, slipping away.”

Sarah: “And what I think is so great about this piece is that it captures that. It reminds us that even places like the Skopje Shopping Center, these giant concrete things that seem like they’ll be around forever, are really just temporary canvases.”

John: “Yeah, for the stories we tell about ourselves. And those stories—they change, just like we do.”

Sarah: “Reading this piece about the Skopje Shopping Center really got me thinking about how we express ourselves through the things we leave behind, not always on purpose, right?”

John: “Oh, totally. And the author of “Graffiti in a Post-Socialist Shopping Center in Skopje” brings up this interesting contrast between the graffiti in the mall and the street art scene elsewhere in Skopje.”

Sarah: “Okay.”

John: “Like, they saw these amazing murals around the city—the kind that just stop you in your tracks. But inside the mall, it’s different. It’s less about these big artistic statements and more like the walls are just this giant guest book.”

Sarah: “A guest book?”

John: “Yeah, full of raw, unfiltered thoughts and declarations.”

Sarah: “That’s such a good point. It’s like the difference between a super-polished statement you make publicly versus a secret you whisper to someone. The graffiti in the mall is more in your face. It’s less about being pretty and more about marking the moment, you know, saying, ‘I was here.’”

John: “Exactly. And when you really look at the messages, it’s pretty wild—the variety. I mean, there’s simple stuff, like just the name ‘Ostrovo’ spray-painted on the wall, or even just the word ‘corn.’”

Sarah: “Huh, like they’re claiming their turf or something?”

John: “Yeah, but then, right next to those, you’ll find intense political slogans like, ‘Capitalism Must Fall.’”

Sarah: “Oh wow. It’s like a crash course in teenage angst spanning generations.”

John: “I love that. One spot is like a sounding board for all these different voices, these snapshots of how Skopje has been changing.”

Sarah: “And it makes you wonder about those people, right? The ones who wrote those messages—were they just letting off steam, or were they trying to start a conversation? Trying to leave their mark on a world that maybe felt out of their control?”

John: “Totally. There was this one message from 2007 that really got to me. It’s kind of heartbreaking, actually. It said, ‘Don’t destroy our works. Thank you.’ It’s like you could hear their voice, that desperate hope that somebody, anybody, would see what they did and understand. Recognize the value in it, even if it doesn’t last.”

Sarah: “It makes you think, doesn’t it? About all these places—the ones we see as ordinary or rundown—but really, they’re full of hidden stories, glimpses into people’s lives.”

John: “Yeah, the Skopje Shopping Center, with its layers of graffiti, is not just a mall.”

Sarah: “Right, it’s like an unintentional archive of emotions, hopes, frustrations, all captured in spray paint.”

John: “It really makes you wonder what stories are hidden in plain sight, right in our own cities, in the places we walk by every day without even thinking twice.”

Sarah: “Maybe it’s just about looking at things in a new way, being open to hearing the stories that these places and walls have to tell.”

John: “Absolutely. And that’s what this deep dive is all about. Thanks for exploring with us.”