

# MILLIONS IN MARBLE

Local attitudes towards tourism in Skopje



Eva van Uunen

## Photograph Frontpage<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This picture was sent to me by Ruza, an artist from Skopje, who makes art pieces protesting the government. This project was exhibited in the Skopje City Museum while I was doing my research. The art piece consisted of three different pieces. The picture shows miniatures of marble buildings representing Skopje 2014 being stashed in a breadbox. This shows how the government chose to invest in buildings and statues instead of food and employment for the population. The other two pieces were 'Nationalism' written with the miniatures (can be seen at <https://kristinabozurska.mk/2018/03/20/work-2/>) and a video (can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txO1VhoA4w4&feature=youtu.be>)



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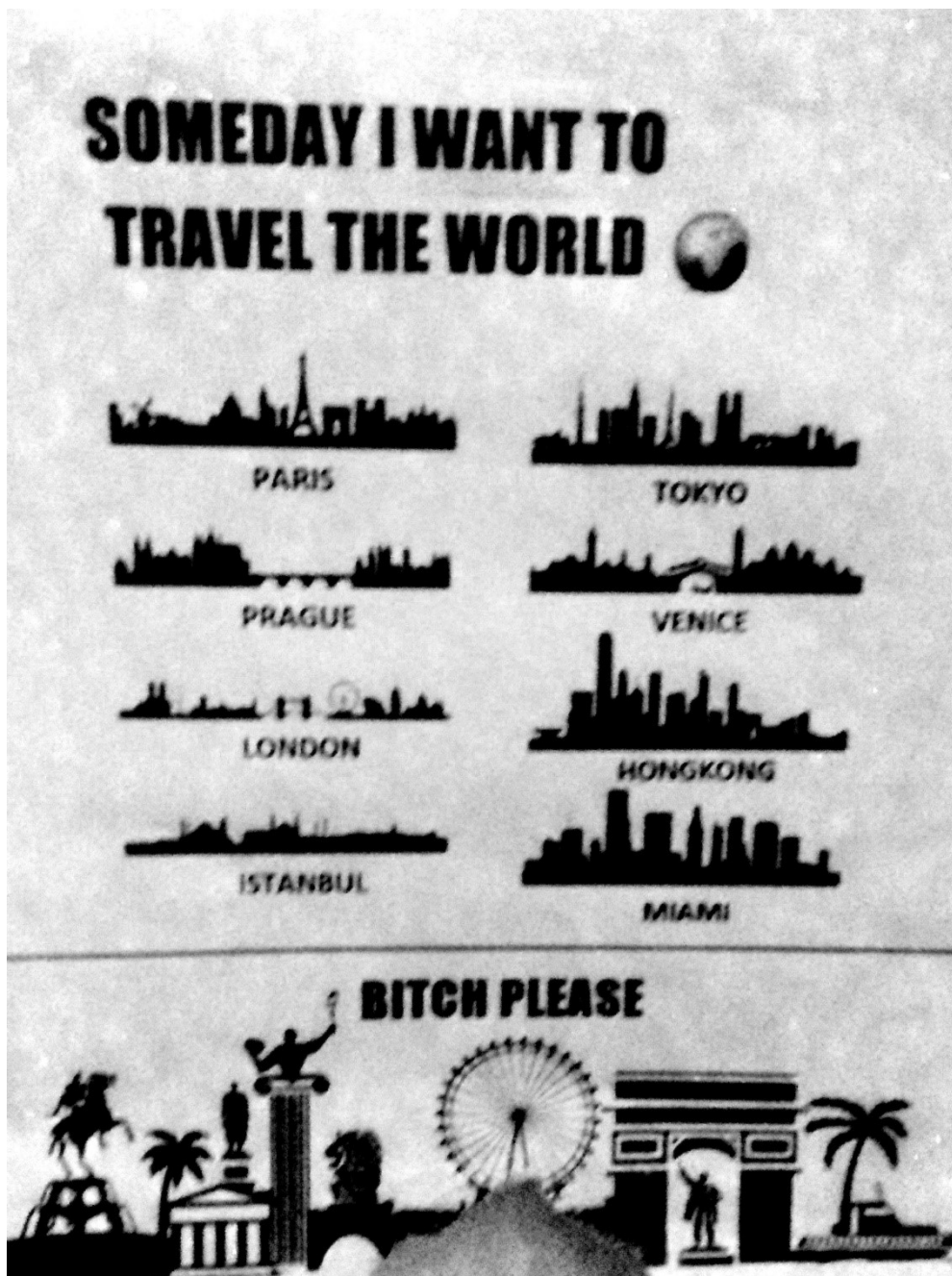
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<sup>2</sup> This poster was hanging on the wall at the hostel I resided in. It shows how Skopje is trying to fit worldwide tourist attractions into one city (as a result from Skopje 2014, implemented by the Macedonian government).

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Looking back at the past months I feel grateful for everything that has happened to me. Being able to end a university degree by finally going into the field and doing what all your tutors have done is a great experience. Finally, I could be an anthropologist instead of learning about and from them. I was happy to go back to Skopje and wanted to find out everything (as much as possible) about living there.

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It has been an adventure that resulted in great experiences!

Eva van Uunen





# 1. Introduction

It has been two years since I first visited the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM, from now on just Macedonia). During my stay I visited several cities and saw the difference between urban and the rural areas. I have seen many touristic highlights and was surprised by the gigantic number of statues in Skopje. After several conversations with members of the local population I found out that Skopje has been transformed the past few years, largely due to government policy that aims to make the city an attractive tourist destination. The people I spoke with expressed their criticism on the changes multiple times. This made me curious to learn more about their experiences with tourism and their attitudes towards the changed look of the city.

Development in the tourism industry had only taken place in Skopje, the capital city of Macedonia. During my stay in 2016, the population was protesting the former government and the changes they had made to the city. For a whole week I could observe the protests, which eventually lasted for half a year. The population marched day after day throwing paint at every statue the government had built in the past few years. According to the government, the investments were supposed to attract more tourists to the city. In contrast with this, the only thing the population experienced was an opportunity for government corruption. The situation I experienced was a result of Skopje 2014 that started in 2010. The project had two main aims: “to draw in more tourists and to try to reclaim aspects of the country’s history” (Gillet, 2015). Initially tourism in Macedonia was focussed on Ohrid. Skopje was, and still is, not perceived as one of the typical tourist destinations. Only recently Skopje, as the capital city, is becoming more popular, partially, resulting from the project.

The project set in motion the development of the tourism sector in Skopje and only recently are tourist facilities and activities being offered. In the initial program 40 monuments, sculptures, renovated facades and new buildings were planned; only to more than triple by 2015. As the name suggests, the project was supposed to be finished by 2014. However, there are still many constructions unfinished today. Apart from being overdue, the project is way over budget too. Before starting, the total costs were estimated to be €80 million, whereas, in 2015, they reached over €560 million (Marusic, 2015). The final costs of the project, however, are not yet known. The costs and the changes to the city are the reason why Skopje 2014 became very controversial and its effectiveness is questioned by the population.

Hearing the criticism on tourism reminded me of the situation that is going on in the capital city of The Netherlands. Amsterdam has done a lot of marketing and investments to attract more tourists. At the same time, the people living in Amsterdam are complaining that they no longer feel at home because it feels like tourists are taking over their city. Moreover, the impression is that tourists usually visit the red-light district and coffeeshops and leave with the assumption that they experienced Dutch culture. This is comparable with what the people I spoke to in Skopje said to me. All the changes that were made to the city are masquerading as Macedonian culture, which they are not entirely. With this comparison in mind, I wanted to find out how the population of Skopje feels about tourism and how their attitudes are determined. Therefore the main question that will be answered with this thesis is: *“What are the factors that influence the attitudes of the population of Skopje towards tourism and tourism promotion?”*.

Attitude can be defined as “a feeling or opinion about something or someone, or a way of behaving”.<sup>3</sup> This thesis will discuss different contexts and effects of tourism that can be used to explain how attitudes might differ among people and circumstances. It includes views from people who work in the tourism sector and people who are not involved with tourists based on their employment. The people working in the tourism sector are more involved economically and their interactions with tourists are mostly employment based. As far as the results show differences, a distinction is made between the two groups and explain why their attitudes differ. People from these groups get in touch with tourists on different occasions and in different amounts, which could influence their attitudes. Tourism, as used in the main question, can be defined as “the business of providing services such as transport, places to stay, or entertainment for people who are on holiday”.<sup>4</sup> This definition will further be explained and elaborated on in the theoretical background.

For this thesis, I made a separation between three main topics that could influence the attitudes of the local population; tourism promotion policies, economic development and interactions. These will be used to explain how people develop certain attitudes. First, tourism promotion policies of the Macedonian government can explain attitudes towards tourism and tourism promotion in Skopje. The government policies and, specifically, Skopje 2014 set in motion the change of the city. I experienced that the project had an impact on society. The population is sceptical towards the project and the structures that were built. I tried to find out what specific effect Skopje 2014 had on the daily life of the population and how they feel

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<sup>3</sup> Cambridge Dictionary online

<sup>4</sup> Cambridge Dictionary online

about the changes. Second, economic development can be used to explain attitudes towards tourism in Skopje. I made a distinction between people who benefit from tourism and people who do not because this can influence their attitudes. On one hand, tourism can increase personal income and have a positive effect on local attitudes. On the other, tourism asks for investments to increase the worth of the city, which can benefit the population. Additionally, I discussed the changing infrastructure and how the local population experiences these changes. Third, I focussed on interactions to explain how attitudes towards individual tourists are formed. The frequency and the nature of interactions between the local population and tourists can be used to explain attitudes. Personal contact is generally the moment when attitudes arise and can change.

The existing literature mainly focuses on the economic effects of tourism and specifically on numbers, growth and money because these results can be quantified and compared. This research does not focus on numbers, it will offer individual experiences and attitudes instead. The results will offer more context to the existing literature on socio-cultural effects. Whereas other research generally states several effects without giving an explanation or individual experiences, I think it is important and interesting to investigate the population's individual attitudes towards tourism and tourism promotion and how they are influenced.

I was curious to find out how the population of Skopje feels about tourism and how they experience their changing environment. It might be interesting for the people living in Skopje to read about other opinions and implicit attitudes they never thought of themselves. Insight into their own and others' experiences can be informative and might create space for people to express their opinion more often. The municipality or the government could use the results from this research as well. This thesis will show how people feel about the changes made to the city to increase tourism and how tourism might have an influence on their life. In future, the results could also be used to minimize the effects of changes in the tourism sector. The municipality could learn how to design tourism in a better way, so that it profits all parties involved.

To cover many different attitudes, I tried to include as many different employment positions as possible. During the fieldwork period, from the 5th of February 2018 until the 13th of April 2018, I spoke with tour guides, hotel management, waiters, students, professors, artists and many others.<sup>5</sup> All this time my focus was on understanding and experiencing the local position. I collected data by using a combination of different qualitative methods. I

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<sup>5</sup> References will be made using fictive names to protect their privacy. When it is relevant I will mention their employment/function.

conducted many semi-structured interviews, which mainly resulted in a background to their personal attitudes. Within interviews, informants were more conscious when talking about their attitudes. They were always checking the environment because there may be people who do not agree with them. While doing participant observation or trying to go native, I had more informal conversations, that resulted in more specific attitudes. Despite mentioning I was working on this research, my informants seemed to feel more open to express their attitudes in a more informal situation.

The rest of this thesis will serve to answer the main research question. I will start with a theoretical background of concepts that are related to tourism. I will give a definition of what tourism is and which activities are part of it. This will be followed by a description of different effects resulting from tourism that can be used to explain different attitudes of the local population and how they are influenced. Firstly, the relationship between tourism, tourism promotion and cultural richness is important to understand how people have seen their city change. Secondly, economic development is important to explain changing attitudes based on different employment positions. Additionally, investments and inequality will be discussed to explain how the population of a host country can benefit or suffer from tourism. Finally, the interactions between tourists and the local population can have different effects on local attitudes towards tourism. Resulting from this general background, I turn to the research location and discuss how these concepts apply to Skopje and Macedonia. This section focusses on how Macedonia has become a tourism country. First, I will discuss Skopje 2014 because it caused most of the changes that took place in the city. Secondly, I will turn to the economic development of Skopje resulting from tourism.

After a discussion of existing literature related to tourism and tourism promotion, I will turn to the empirical results collected during my fieldwork in Skopje. They will be discussed in three different chapters. Firstly, the chapter ‘Tourism and Tourism Promotion’, will explain what effect Skopje 2014 has had on the population and how this influences their attitudes towards tourism in Skopje. Secondly, in the chapter ‘Tourism and Economic Development’, I will discuss how investments of the government were done, how this can economically benefit the local population and result in economic development for Skopje. Finally, in ‘Tourism and Interactions’, I explain how interactions have an influence on local attitudes towards tourism. These chapters offer environmental or activity sketches, individual quotes from informants and general results I found.

The final chapter will discuss the most important results that were found during the research and how these relate to the existing literature. I will show what conclusions can be

drawn from the results, point out where further research could be done and finally answer the main research question. In the appendixes, I offer information about the spatial and financial distribution of Skopje 2014, illustrative photographs, a summary of the thesis and a reflection on the research.

## 2. What is tourism?

Ever since human behaviour has been recorded, people are travelling to known and unknown places. However, there is little anthropological research done on tourism. This can be explained by a similarity between the journey of tourists and the anthropologist. This similarity makes it difficult for anthropologists to distance themselves from tourists and therefore they tend to avoid research in the field of tourism (Burns, 2004: 6). However, in case of this research the focus is mainly on the host country and the local population which makes it possible to create a distance.

People tend to travel for work, trade, family visits, exploration, colonisation and relaxation. Some of these types of travel can be defined as tourism. The action seems clear; however, it turns out to be more difficult to give a good and complete definition because tourism can be approached from different perspectives. Leiper (1979) provides three different approaches to define tourism. The first definition to be discussed is one from an economic perspective. Leiper (1979) quotes McIntosh by saying: "Tourism can be defined as the science, art and business of attracting and transporting visitors, accommodating them and graciously catering to their needs and wants." (McIntosh in Leiper, 1979: 392). This definition focuses on the actions of host countries and leaves out of sight the tourists involved. In contrast, the second definition proposed in the article focuses on the people and is a definition of tourists instead of tourism. This technical definition entails that tourists are "temporary visitors staying at least twenty-four hours in the country visited and the purpose of whose journey can be classified under one of the following headings: (a) leisure (recreation, holiday, health, study, religion, and sport) or (b) business, family, mission, meeting." (IUOTO in Leiper, 1979: 393). Where the economic definition focuses on a country's actions and the technical definition on tourists' actions, the third definition combines the two by stating that tourism is "the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents, in so far as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected to any earning activity." (Leiper, 1979: 394). This is called the holistic definition. As these definitions show, there are two major parties involved with tourism: host countries and people in the position of tourists. This research will use the holistic definition because it considers both parties involved with tourism. The host country consists of both the political actors and the population, which both have an interest in tourism. Where politics can be used to promote tourism, the population offers services to make the tourists feel welcome. Apart from the host country, the tourists should be included because they are the beneficiaries of changes in the

host country. These two parties might have deviating or coinciding interests, making it crucial to involve them both.

There are several categories of tourism that can be present in a country. However, this research will focus on cultural tourism. The basic assumption of cultural tourism is that the tourists desire to learn something new while travelling (Petroman, 2013: 385). Tourist activities are designed and offered by host countries, however, tourists are the ones who decide about the things they want to do. Anything can be defined as cultural tourism and it is not place or time dependent because it is an act of tourists. The effects tourism has on a host country and its population differ based on situations and countries.

The following section will discuss how different effects of tourism can change the population's attitude towards tourism and tourism promotion. First, tourism promotion as governmental policy is introduced. This will be linked to the present cultural richness in a host country and the creation of new tourist activities. Next, economic development resulting from tourism will be discussed. With the development of a (larger) tourism sector it is possible generate more money flow and to create new jobs. Last, it is important to look at changes in the society and interactions between people. Interactions are the basis for individual attitudes towards tourists as people instead of merely looking at the effects tourism induces. For example, having a negative attitude towards changes in society does not necessarily mean people are negative towards the tourists visiting their country.

## 2.1 Tourism promotion

A general conception is that tourism is related to development, progress and prosperity for people and the country. Therefore, tourism is being promoted largely across the globe. Tourism is an agent of change (Duffield, 1982: 254), both economically and spatially. Governments are changing the environment of host countries to attract more people. On one hand, this can lead to strengthening cultural identities and cultural heritage. On the other, it can lead to adaptation to tourist expectations and providing tourists with what they look for, instead of what a country has to offer. This does risk superseding the true cultural identity of a country.

### *2.1.1 Governmental policies*

To attract more tourists, governments sometimes decide to invest in the tourism sector. It must be questioned if these investments have the desired effect, seeing that “investing in tourism means investing in dependency” (Doğan. 1989: 219) because most partners in the

process are likely to be from outside the country. The success and support for tourism promotion policies in a country greatly depends on the attitudes of the local population towards the government. Doğan (1989) makes a distinction between two political situations: pluralism and one party (or one man) rule. In case of political pluralism, most of the population can be expected to approve the plans. In the latter, the population is polarized; tourism is either favoured or not favoured. In this case, the government will likely suppress the opposition. (Doğan, 1989: 227)

To get support from the population, it is important to minimize the negative effects of tourism promotion (Doğan, 1989: 227). Ideally, promoting tourism benefits both the tourism sector and the population at the same time. Sustainable tourism improves the quality of life in a country by offering visitors a good experience which at the same time leaving the population with positive effects. This can be done by involving residents in the tourism planning and development process. (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005: 380-381) Tosun (2000) discusses two main considerations of public involvement. First, “people have the right to be informed ... on matters which affect them”. This gives them the opportunity to express their views on plans. His second consideration is that “the failure of plans and decision-making process could not determine public preferences correctly”. (Tosun, 2000: 615) Nevertheless, community participation is important in tourism development. To realize community participation, it is important “to design development in such a way that intended beneficiaries are encouraged to take matters into their own hands” (Stone, 1989: 207). Through community participation, it is possible to satisfy local needs. Finally, apart from having respect for the population, it is important to respect the environment where tourism is planned (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005: 382).

### *2.1.2 Cultural richness*

Countries experience a tension to be part of the global tourism movement and desire to retain their cultural identity at the same time (Archer et al, 2005: 89). According to Duffield (1982), tourism has encouraged cultural identity and independence (254). A strong cultural identity can attract tourists. For example, architectural traditions and ancestral heritage can be attractive. Most development resulting from governmental policies is experienced in the urban areas, which makes people from rural areas more likely to move (Zaei & Zaei, 2013: 16). A government might decide to change a certain area to benefit the tourism industry when there are fewer people living there. Archer et al (2005) state that it might in some cases be profitable to exploit local culture and customs to satisfy the visitor, possibly at the expense of



local pride and dignity. As the country changes to benefit tourism, tourists are found to be motivated by a quest for authenticity (Archer et al, 2005: 88) because they would rather see real history instead of designed activities. On a quest for authenticity, visitors more often find a “phony-folk-culture” or a “Disneyland” at their holiday destination (Urbanowicz in Smith, 2012: 113) instead of the real history of a country.

Zaei & Zaei (2013) look at tourism in a more positive way. They state that the local population can profit from the investments done by the government. People can make use of the cultural and social events and of sports and leisure facilities that have been created to attract tourists. (15) Moreover, local life can be improved by right allocation of investments. By investing in sustainable local facilities and infrastructure, education and healthcare might be improved (Zaei & Zaei, 2013: 15).

The biggest change, which is taking place at many different tourism destinations, is importing activities from other regions. The import of (non-native) products and the waste they leave can influence the environment and the population. In addition, existing problems like prostitution, gambling, crime and drug trafficking can evolve to a greater scale because of tourism.

## 2.2 Economic development

From an anthropological perspective, tourism is not about the local population or the host country. According to Burns (2004), tourism is about economics and tourists. Research must be done using quantitative methods instead of qualitative anthropological methods. (Burns, 2004: 7) In many other studies on tourism this is confirmed because authors tend focus on the economic effects tourism can have. These results are quantifiable and therefore comparable with other studies and contexts. A host country can profit from tourism in quite an easy way because tourists spend their money in hotels, restaurants and other tourist facilities. Duffield (1982) describes this as direct expenditure (250). An extra benefit is that tourism brings in foreign currency (Dritsakis, 2004: 306), which is deemed to be worth more than a countries’ own currency. According to Dritsakis (2004) there is a causal relationship between international tourism earnings and economic growth (305), which explains why countries would want to promote tourism. The primary purpose for promoting tourism in developing countries is to earn foreign currency (Zaei & Zaei, 2013: 15). Another reason for studying economic effects is that tourism can lead to development and benefits for the host country. Tourism can generate income for a country and employment opportunities for the population.

### *2.2.1 Employment*

The tourism industry is a source of employment and leads to the creation of new jobs (Zaei & Zaei, 2013: 17). The effects of employment in the tourism industry seem to be most effective in less developed regions (Archer et al, 2005: 82). Growth in tourism demand increases the number of jobs in hotels, restaurants and other tourist facilities. New jobs are created and income in certain existing jobs can increase within the tourism industry and beyond (Duffield: 1982: 250). People working in the tourism industry will profit directly from the tourists spending money because their income depends on tourists. For other sectors, the financial effect of tourism is not direct thus more difficult to predict.

The tourism industry seems to create new jobs which can be expected to be positive. However, there are some downsides to employment in the tourism sector according to Smith (2012). Through interaction with tourists, employees in the tourism sector may obtain hard currencies as tips, which is perceived as positive. Additionally, this could lead to engaging in the black market or as intermediaries in illicit activities. (Smith, 2012: 80) Secondly, increased employment opportunities do not always lead to increased income. Regardless of the employment opportunities, the more 'respectable' jobs ask for higher educated people. There is need for expertise and experience that the local population is deemed not to have. This results in expatriates occupying these jobs and capturing the higher income. For example, airlines, travel agencies and hotel chains are run by foreigners who take a big portion of the profits. (Doğan, 1989: 219) The lower paid jobs ask for less experience and are suitable for the local population. This separation can lead to resentment and deteriorate the international relationships (Archer et al, 2005: 86). If the jobs created by tourism are only low paid and uneducated they will not improve a person's wellbeing (Duffield, 1982: 255). Thirdly, only two out of five jobs provide people with year-round, full-time employment (Duffield, 1982: 251). This is the result of seasonality of tourism in the host country. Finally, according to Dritsakis (2004), income from tourism seems to be distributed over a wide range of the population (306). However, income is only distributed among the people working in the tourism industry. This can lead to more differences between people working in tourism and those who work in other sectors.

### *2.2.2 Investments*

An important factor in economic growth due to tourism is that it is related to the needs and desires of tourists (Dritsakis, 2004: 305). To meet tourists' desires, investments will be needed. The demand for sufficient infrastructure will increase as the tourism industry grows.

(Zaei & Zaei, 2013: 17). Most important are highways and airports to improve the accessibility of a country and the services it provides (Becken, 2008: 427). These investments can also be positive for the population. For example, improved public transport or highways make it easier to work further from home or to visit friends and relatives.

Secondly, it might be interesting to invest in the public space because tourists will be more likely to go to an attractive environment. According to Zaei & Zaei (2013) it does not matter whether this environment is natural or built (19). This means that countries that do not have an attractive environment can create one to attract tourists.

### *2.2.3 Inequality*

Money earned in the tourism industry is partially redistributed within the host country (Archer et al, 2005: 82). However, usually only a small part of the population benefits from tourism (Doğan, 1989: 218). Archer et al (2005) show that benefits from the tourism industry are unevenly distributed and can even create more inequality between regions and people. Their results from Turkey show that the coastal (touristic) areas received economic support at the expense of rural areas. (Archer et al, 2005: 83) This shows that rural areas are supported less, and the population might feel deprived. It can be said that the problem is in the allocation of the money and not in the amount of money.

An effect of inequality, or perceived inequality, is urbanization. As people in rural areas experience that money ends up in the tourism areas, they might try to become part of the profiting group. They expect to end up with better circumstances and more stability if they start living in the popular cities (Mullins, 1992: 188). This in turn could lead to overcrowded cities with a lack of employment and abandonment of rural areas.

Tourism can have both positive and negative economic effects. Economic benefits often do not reach the local population and when outsiders run the tourism industry, tourism becomes a form of imperialism (Burns, 2004: 10). The effects tourism has on a country depend heavily on the nature of a country's economy (Archer et al, 2005: 84). In some cases, the economic benefits do not weigh up to the environmental and social costs of tourism (Archer et al, 2005: 81).

## 2.3 Interactions

Tourism leads to mixing people from different situations and backgrounds (Archer et al, 2005: 79), and in some cases the people interact. Interactions are “occasions where two or

more people or things communicate with or react to each other”.<sup>6</sup> Interaction between people can either lead to a better understanding and goodwill between these people (Archer et al, 2005: 89) or might lead to problems. Pi-Sunyer (2012) argues that local attitudes towards tourism are partially based on personal experiences with tourists. At the same time, their attitudes are influenced by images and stereotypes of other visitors. (Pi-Sunyer in Smith, 2012: 189) The following paragraphs will explain how these attitudes are formed.

### *2.3.1 Contact between the local population and tourists*

The contact theory, which is used in sociology, can be used to explain the positive effect interactions can have on discrimination and prejudice. This theory explains that more contact with the ‘newcomers’ could lead to the reduction of prejudice towards them. Contact can provide an extended view on cultural, political and spiritual behaviour of people from another part of the world. When applying this theory to tourism, all tourists can be defined as one group. If contact between tourists and the population of the host country is positive, it will theoretically result in more positive attitudes towards tourists (Allport, 1954: 265). The mixing of different cultures can result in community enrichment (Zaei & Zaei, 2013: 13). Learning about other cultures makes people more aware of differences and creates a society of more cultural backgrounds. Interactions vary between members of a touristic area; people working in the tourism sector will have contact on a regular basis, whereas people who work behind the scenes or in other sectors will not interact with tourists often (Stronza, 2001: 267).

According to Doğan (1989) “tourism transforms human relationships”. Before, interactions were about moral values and occasional contact. The focus, however, has shifted and interactions are now based on economic gain. Contact has become more commercial and less personal. (Doğan, 1989: 218) Doğan (1989) states that the absence of strong interpersonal relationships attenuates the influence of the tourists on the hosts (1989: 220). This does not, by definition, mean that the absence of interpersonal relationships diminishes the existing attitudes. Resulting from the changing human relationships, interactions between tourists and the local population can become more impersonal. To overcome these impersonal attitudes, tour operators are trying to offer one-to-one contact between tourists and the population (Smith, 2012: 10). These ‘planned’ interactions can lead to a better understanding between the two groups. However, as the number of tourists increases, so will the visibility of the

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<sup>6</sup> Cambridge Dictionary online

problems according to Smith (2012: 17). Continued contact may, at the same time, result in traditional habits being engulfed by tourist habits (Nash in Smith, 2012: 49).

Based on the contact theory, there are also cases in which contact does not lead to more positive attitudes because of personality differences. Allport (1954) states that “certain personalities resist the influences of contact”. (Allport, 1954: 279) For these people, interactions do not have any influence on their attitudes. In general, young people are more interested in meeting new people and learning about their lifestyles (Doğan, 1989: 224) compared to older people. When it comes to tourist destinations, the local population and tourists do not really have a choice about their interactions. In these cases, people will have very different reasons for the things they do and the way they do them. They are likely to have contrasting lifestyles and levels of income compared to the tourists (Archer et al, 2005: 85), which can cause tensions. Based on lifestyle, there may be features they do not like or even loathe about each other. Based on the level of income, tourists can generate economic profits for the population. However, on the other hand, they can cause a form of competition or jealousy and even criminal behaviour. The risk of people meeting is that they start looking for differences instead of similarities. The lack of understanding for these differences can lead to additional cultural, social and moral stresses (Archer et al, 2005: 86), whereas similarities can easily lead to connectivity.

Contact between tourists and the population may lead to actual competition. As the problems aforementioned were based on personal beliefs, the population might turn these into practice. Archer et al (2005) describe it as an opportunity for the population to 'redress the balance'. Doğan (1989) talks about resentment because of their wealth and luxurious life styles. Tourists are vulnerable and often become a victim of robbery or crimes committed by the population. (Archer et al, 2005: 88; Doğan, 1989: 218)

### 3. Tourism in Macedonia

This research took place in Macedonia, former part of the Yugoslav republic. As discussed previously, tourism is one of the fastest growing industries and can easily result in economic growth. It has therefore become a priority task to all governments, especially for small and developing countries like Macedonia, to create a stable tourism industry. (Petrevska, 2012a: 118)

In 2007, Macedonia was ranked 83<sup>rd</sup> out of 124 countries on a list of 'go-to' holiday destinations. In 2011, it climbed up slightly, being 76<sup>th</sup> out of 139. However, many of its neighbouring countries are ranked higher. (Petrevska, 2012a: 125) This position can be explained by the country's history as being part of Yugoslavia until 1991 (Graan, 2013: 166) and the ethnic conflict that took place in 2001 which had a very negative effect on tourism (Marinoski & Korunovski, 2012: 20). Nowadays, Macedonia still has an image of being "at war" and it will take time to make this image disappear (Marinoski & Korunovski, 2012: 22) and convince tourists to visit.

#### 3.1 Tourism promotion policy

The Macedonian government is working hard to improve its image and to attract tourists. It has designed many different strategies to achieve this goal. In 2003, they prepared the "Global Study on Tourism in Macedonia". Unfortunately, this study was never implemented. In 2009, they tried again with the "National Strategy on Tourism Development in Macedonia 2009 – 2013". This strategy's goal was to make Macedonia a famous travel and tourism destination in Europe, based on cultural and natural heritage (Government of the Republic of Macedonia, 2009: 3).

Despite these strategies, Petrevska and Dimitrov (2013) argued that rural tourism in Macedonia was not exploited enough at the time of their study (64). During that same period, a "National Strategy for rural tourism" was adopted for the period from 2012 until 2017. This strategy focuses on thirty development areas in the country suitable for tourist activities (Petrevska and Dimitrov, 2013: 65-66). The strategies all show that the government is working hard to make the country more attractive for tourists. To amplify this process, they invested more money in new accommodation facilities, education and training for people working in the tourism industry, improved the infrastructure and they provided domestic tourists with discounts (Petrevska, 2012a: 122). These development strategies resulted in a

growth of the number of tourists from 735.650 in 2014 to 856.843 in 2016 (State Statistical Office, 2017: 587).

### *3.1.1 Skopje 2014, the make-over*

Despite the strategies mentioned above, the government mainly focussed on the capital city and left out the rest of the country. Skopje was expected to attract a lot of tourists so it also needed some planning. Since the year 2010 the government has started an urban renovation plan: Skopje 2014. This project aimed to make Skopje more attractive to tourists and to promote national pride (Graan, 2013: 161). The necessities to accomplish this goal were: "a new philharmonic hall, a new national theatre, three new government buildings, a new business centre, a new church, three new museums, two new hotels, a triumphal arch, two new bridges, and over 20 new bronze and marble statues of national historical figures" (Graan, 2013: 161). During the implementation of Skopje 2014, the number of visitors in Skopje grew from 141.386 in 2011 to 228.602 in 2016 (State Statistical Office, 2017: 587; State Statistical Office, 2016: 18).

According to Graan (2013) the government's national strategies for promoting tourism have led to a polarization of Macedonia's residents (162). Supporters of the make-over (Graan, 2013: 162) can be expected to have experienced mainly positive effects of tourism. Consequently, it can be expected that the people who are critical about the changes are the ones who are negatively affected by tourism. The opposition consists of students, architects, intellectuals and members of Macedonia's NGO sector (Graan, 2013: 162). Graan (2013) does not provide an explanation as to why these people are critical. It could be that they do not agree with the strategic choices made, which seem to be designed with the sole purpose of creating economic growth.

## 3.2 Economic development

Just like in other countries, tourism promotion in Macedonia aimed to trigger economic growth (Petrevska and Dimitrov, 2013: 64). Petrevska (2011a) states that creating economic growth must be complemented by other goals. First, tourists' needs must be satisfied because they will create the flow of money, which leads to economic growth. Second, a country needs resource protection to secure sustainable activities and to reduce the risk of losing national heritage. Third, tourism must be integrated into the socio-economic community development. (Petrevska, 2011a: 140) These three goals can only be achieved when the government keeps in mind the effects development might have.

Macedonia's government has tried to boost the country's economy and development by attracting tourists. To do so, and to benefit the population, they decreased the VAT rate from 18% to 5% (Petrevska, 2012b: 68). Apart from boosting the economy, tourism can have negative effects for the economy too. In the first decade of the 21st century, a large part of the world had dealt with the economic crisis which had its most negative effects on tourism related areas and the overall economic development (Petrevska, 2012b: 63). Not only did fewer tourists come to the country, they also spent far less than they would have before. Petrevska (2012b) points out that in the second period of the economic crisis (from 2008 – 2010), Macedonia did not face further extensive negative shocks to the tourism industry (65).

### *3.2.1 A source of (un)employment*

Criteria for development priorities are mainly focussed on the contribution they have on solving problems a country faces. In case of Macedonia this is unemployment (Petrevska, 2011b: 102). Macedonia deals with a relatively high unemployment rate of about 35%. The tourism industry is labour intensive and can create new jobs to decrease the unemployment rate. Petrevska (2011b) expects that by 2019, 1 out of 16,1 jobs would be in the tourism sector, which comes up to a total of 40.000. (Petrevska, 2011b: 105-106)

Employment in the tourism sector is dependent upon the number of tourists. Numbers show that most tourist arrivals are in July and August. These numbers grow and decline between May and October (State Statistical Office, 2016: 11). Seasonal fluctuations will result in the creation of jobs during high season and can at the same time result in unemployment during the low season. This means that people working in the tourism sector cannot be certain of year-round employment and income.

By forecasting, or at least knowing when most tourists will arrive and when there is less employment, people can prepare themselves. Employees that would become unemployed in low season can prepare themselves and start looking for another job in time. For companies in the tourism industry, like hotels, airlines and facilities, forecasting can be used to give an insight in the number of tourists they can expect and how to be ready for them (Petrevska, 2011a: 135).



## 4. Tourism and Tourism Promotion

Since the year 2010, Skopje 2014 is being executed in the centre of Skopje. The project aims to make Skopje attractive to tourists and to promote national pride by multiple new buildings and other structures. As the name suggests, the project was meant to be completed by 2014. However, in 2018, a fair amount of building projects and statues are unfinished and there are still many construction sites. Furthermore, several structures that are completed already suffer from deterioration.

Millions of euros have been spent and the population has become more and more critical towards the government. The government claims the project was (partially) meant to promote tourism. However, the population questions their intentions. It is important and interesting to include a chapter on the attitudes regarding tourism promotion and specifically Skopje 2014. In this chapter I will show how attitudes towards the government influence attitudes towards tourism and tourism promotion.

### 4.1 Criticism on governmental policies

Apart from Skopje 2014, there are no other governmental initiatives to improve tourism. Mrs Pacoska is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics in Stip, Macedonia. In her own research she has focussed on the country in general and on Skopje specifically, to find out what is happening in the tourism sector. She stated that “Macedonia is always a step behind compared to other countries... There is a lack of thought over tourism”. Surrounding countries, like Croatia and Greece, have developed into typical tourist destinations years before Macedonia. The government observed these countries successfully transform and, as a result, wanted to change in a similar way. Changes had to take place in a faster pace, which led to Skopje 2014.

The negative attitudes towards Skopje 2014 are, in part, the result of criticism of the population towards the government. If people are not connected to the government in any way, they rather stay away from it. Some of my informants explained how they observed their environment change and almost never expressed their opinions about this. They were scared for the consequences it might have. When the government presented the project, the population did not know how this would affect them. Once they saw the changes it was too late to complain. The government has been implementing the project for the past few years and the population felt they could not do anything about it. “First people didn’t take it seriously; the idea was not complete. I couldn’t believe the project design when it was

shown”, Ruza said to me.<sup>7</sup> The design looked incomplete and the population did not know what they could expect. The government never involved the population in making their plans. According to Choi & Sirakaya (2005), involving residents in the tourism planning and development process could result in more positive attitudes towards tourism promotion and Skopje (380-381). However, the population was not able to express their opinion or to be part of the process. This could explain why the population of Skopje has a mainly negative attitude towards the project.

The population is very hesitant when it comes to expressing their attitudes towards the government. People gave me the impression they were scared to be honest because the government might find out, arrest and convict them. There is also a group of people who stay ignorant or distant on purpose because they feel that expressing their opinion will not make a change.<sup>8</sup> This is comparable with what Doğan (1989: 227) stated. As explained in the theoretical part, the attitudes towards the government and their policies are dependent on the political organisation of a country. Doğan (1989) makes a distinction between two political situations: pluralism and one party (or one man) rule. In Macedonia, they have had a government with one big political party ruling together with smaller parties between 2006 until 2017. Despite having multiple parties, the situation was most comparable to one party ruling. The population of Skopje is polarized between favouring tourism or not favouring because the government suppresses the opposition. This explains the caution of the local population to express their opinion regarding Skopje 2014.

Apart from the statues and buildings that were the result of Skopje 2014, the government invested in promotional videos and new flight connections, which could have resulted in the increasing number of tourists. From residing in the hostel, I learned that the main reason for coming to Skopje are the cheap flights. Another reason for coming to Skopje are the stories travellers hear from other people. Through conversations with other travellers, people have become curious to see the city themselves. Since implementing Skopje 2014, the city is, among other names, being called the capital of kitsch because of the baroque style buildings and the huge number of statues in the very centre of Skopje. Tourists are shocked by the look of the city and make fun of it. When they talk to other travellers they recommend going to Skopje to see the crazy situation that is going on. Ilyo is the owner of a hostel at the edge of the very centre of Skopje and meets tourists daily. He had one guest in the hostel that

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Ruza, artist (also making critique art about Skopje 2014). 1-4-2018

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Aneta, artist (also making critique art about Skopje 2014). 7-4-2018

clearly showed that word of mouth is a good way to promote a city and that using the word ‘strange’ makes people even more curious to see this for themselves.<sup>9</sup>

*Why did you come? ...*

*Because a friend told me.*

*What? Just go there and what? ...*

*He told me you got to go to city, you got to go to see Skopje.*

*And?*

*That’s all. He just said I have to come, it’s really really strange.*

*... Strange? That’s actually a better word than what I’ve heard before.*

*I mean strange in a good way you know, it’s really nice.*

*Yeah, I know, thanks.*

Despite the increasing number of tourists visiting because the city is ‘crazy’ or ‘strange’, it is probably not the effect the government was looking for when they designed Skopje 2014. It might keep tourists from coming to Macedonia if they are looking for a more authentic experience.

#### 4.2 Statues do not create tourism

In the past few years, tourism in Macedonia has increased. The question is, however, what the explanation for this increase was. Two major things have been happening in the tourism sector in Macedonia. First, statues and buildings were built to create new tourist activities. Second, WizzAir has created many new flight connections. These flights are very cheap because the government offered subsidies.<sup>10</sup> According to several tour guides, it can be questioned whether Skopje 2014 caused the increasing number of tourists. The surrounding countries did not have a similar project as Skopje 2014 and increased their number of tourists in the same period. “There seems to be no difference with other countries that can be explained by the project”.<sup>11</sup> If my informant is right, this is a first argument to question the effectiveness of Skopje 2014.

According to Liljana “Travelling is not supposed to be about seeing buildings”<sup>12</sup> so why would we expect tourists to come based on the project? Skopje 2014 was about changing

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Ilyo, owner of a hostel. 8-2-2018

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Veton, co-owner of tour organisation. 21-2-2018

<sup>11</sup> Informal conversation with tour guide at Skopje City Museum. 24-2-2018

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Liljana, employee in Skopje City Mall. 31-1-2018

the look of the city to attract tourists. Mrs Pacoska thinks that “the government is promoting tourism in the wrong way” because they only focussed on buildings and statues. “The investments that were done in buildings and statues are not in the right place and without regard of the points of interest that were already offered by the country... They should look at what the country has to offer... Macedonia has plenty of mountains, so they should do something with that.”<sup>13</sup> Instead of paying attention to the already present natural beauty, the government decided to build statues and buildings. This resulted in resistance from the population. The population thinks that statues and buildings should not be the reason tourists visit their city. They would like to see tourists visit their city for different reasons. There are highlights that have existed for a longer period and are a better representation of Macedonian history. It is thus important for a country to see what it already offers instead of creating a city that only looks nice while it does not show the identity of the country.

When I asked people about their opinion on the project or the statues in general, their behaviour changed, and they seemed more distant. “You really want to know my opinion?”, Ilyo said to me. He understood that his opinion depends on his employment and tried to make a distinction between his opinion as regular resident of Skopje and his opinion as hostel owner. From a personal point of view, he is negative about the project because the city is no longer like the city he grew up in. “The reality is that they did, for me, for many people, a wrong move with this.”<sup>14</sup> His opinion as hostel owner, however, is more positive and will be discussed later. Other informants stated that they “liked the old look of the city better and would like to go back to the old look of the city. The old town had spirit and that spirit disappeared when they started Skopje 2014”<sup>15</sup>. The people in Skopje experience nostalgia towards the old look of the city and have negative attitudes when looking at Skopje 2014 as tourism promotion.

#### 4.3 Skopje 2014 is not Macedonian culture

Some informants believe that Skopje 2014 caused the increase in tourism, which is deemed to be positive for the country. Nevertheless, almost everyone complains about the number of statues that were placed in the city. “There are way too many and they do not match with the style of the rest of the city”. Skopje is being called the ‘capital of kitsch’, ‘Disneyland’ and

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Prof. Pacoska, professor on tourism at Stip University. 9-2-2018

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Ilyo, owner of a hostel. 8-2-2018

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Vasa, graduate student and working as a consultant. 6-4-2018

‘mini-Vegas’ because everything looks (and is) fake or new.<sup>16</sup> In Skopje it is impossible to walk through the city without seeing any statues or baroque style buildings. However, the population thinks they are superfluous and do not like them, whereas they result in astonishment among tourists.

The project resulted in many different statues. Nevertheless, it has failed to represent crucial periods in history. There are no reminders of the Ottoman Empire that covered 500 years of Macedonian history or of the Second World War. “It would be better to have monuments of every period in history”. Now most statues represent people who are or were connected to the government that created the project. “The first president of Macedonia, as an independent country, has no statue in the city because he was from the other political party”.<sup>17</sup> People are negative about the limited amount of history that is represented by the project and would rather see different people and periods represented in the statues and buildings. Especially the first president of Macedonia deserves a statue according to the population. Other suggestions might be to focus more on the Old Bazar area because it reminds people of the Ottoman Empire. The streets in that part of the city are well preserved and represent the old look of the city.

Apart from missing parts of Macedonian history, some people think the project represents a fake history. Many buildings are made in baroque style despite the lack of a baroque period in Macedonia. Most of the buildings in the centre already existed in a different style. “They have just been sugar coated like a birthday cake”<sup>18</sup> to meet the plans of the government. Several informants think that ‘sugar coating’ existing buildings was unnecessary and a waste of money because it did not add anything to the city. Most buildings pre-existed, and the new look is mostly made fun of. “It would have been better to use modern, socialist or brutalist style because they fit better in the environment.”<sup>19</sup> These styles were already used in the city before the implementation of Skopje 2014. Zlatko joked that: “You can’t get attention using the feathers of your neighbours”<sup>20</sup>, meaning that the country should have unique things to attract tourists instead of imitations of other countries. Again, this shows that the overall opinion towards the project is that it invested in the wrong things.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Ilyo, owner of a hostel. 8-2-2018

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Ljupcho, owner of tour organization. 22-2-2018

<sup>18</sup> Informal conversations with hostel staff. 6-4-2018

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Ace, graduate student. 3-4-2018

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Zlatko, co-owner of a hostel. 12-2-2018

As artists, Ruza and Aneta are very critical towards Skopje 2014. In a response they both made art pieces to express their critique on the project and the government.<sup>21</sup> One of their critiques is that the things built in the city do not fit in the art history of the country. The government decided on using a baroque style for all the changes that would be made. The baroque period, however, took place while Macedonia was under the Ottoman rule which means this art style was never used in the country. As stated in the previous paragraph, styles that would fit in the country are socialist and brutalist because these styles were developed more recently and were already present in the city before the start of Skopje 2014. For the project, artists did not have a say in the style of the statues that would be built. Either they made a design in baroque style, as the government wanted, or they did not contribute to the project. Despite being asked and offered quite some money, Aneta refused to take part in the project. “I wouldn’t sell my soul to the devil by participating in the project” is how Aneta made her opinion clear to me. For Aneta her artistic freedom and creating something she likes is more important than to be part of the project and earning money.<sup>22</sup>

Another critique, which was shared by many people, is that the quality of what was built is very low. Vlatko summarized this argument by saying “I take quality over quantity”.<sup>23</sup> One example of the bad quality is leakage in the basement of the Archaeological Museum, where they store all their unexhibited art. Ace argued that “the construction of anything near the riverbed was prohibited by law to preserve the natural flow of the river. The government changed this law for Skopje 2014 which changed the flow of the river and increased the likelihood of floods”<sup>24</sup>. These floods could cover a big part of the city centre and damage a big part of the statues. In the theoretical background I explained that it is important to respect the environment where tourism is planned (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005: 382). In this example, the Macedonian government failed to do so. People are already negative about the way the government is changing the city, regardless of the effects it has on the environment. However, in this case, flooding the river makes their attitude even more negative because it affects them personally. Many people work in the city centre that would be flooded and repairs would cost a lot of money the country does not have.

Trees were cut overnight, and statues appeared without any notice, seemingly to prevent the population from protesting. I remember tour guide Georgi telling me that people

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<sup>21</sup> Ruza’s piece is used on the cover of the thesis. Appendix 3 shows Aneta her art pieces.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Aneta, artist (also making critique art about Skopje 2014). 7-4-2018

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Vlatko, Employee IT firm. 9-3-2018

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Ace, graduate student. 3-4-2018

on his tour asked him about statues he had never seen because they were placed overnight.<sup>25</sup> For him, as he works as a tour guide, it is crucial to know about every statue. Tourists expect him to know about everything and to be able to answer their questions. If he is not informed about changes, he will not be able to give tourists the information they want, and tourists might be less satisfied with their experience. The unpredictability about when changes will take place and what the change will be, results in negativity towards the government and tourism promotion.

#### 4.4 Cultural richness in Skopje

Skopje 2014 resulted in approximately 136 buildings, statues and other structures. They placed an imitation of the Arch the Triumph (Porta Macedonia) and an extended version of the Brandenburger Tor (Park of The Woman Freedom-Fighter) to meet the government's ideal look of the city. They placed a 22-meter-high statue (Warrior on a Horse) that looks a lot like Alexander the Great. It not only looks like him, the statue is placed opposite a huge statue of Philip II of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great) which makes it even more likely to represent Alexander the Great. However, the statue may be called Alexander because of the ongoing dispute between Greece and Macedonia.<sup>26</sup> According to Ilyo this is just 'territorial pissing'<sup>27</sup> because both countries claim Alexander's heritage. Moreover, they placed ships in the Vardar river despite the lack of any ships in the river in recent history. By appearance they could easily be used in a Pirates of the Caribbean movie. These examples show that the government has designed a look for the city that was inspired by other countries, regardless of their own history.<sup>28</sup> According to the local population, the government did not design a look that fits in the country; they just collected things they liked about other places. This makes the city feel like an imitation and explains why tourists are making fun of it and why the population is not satisfied with the new look of their city.

Recently, a new government was elected. Now that the government has changed, almost all unfinished constructions have been cancelled, which has resulted in quite some fenced areas in the centre. Not only are investments in these places thrown away, the new government is even making plans to remove, relocate and demolish some statues. In the first place many people think that "there was no need to make any changes".<sup>29</sup> Many informants

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<sup>25</sup> Informal conversation with Georgi, tour guide of free walking tours. 15-4-2018

<sup>26</sup> Informal conversation with Georgi, tour guide of free walking tours. 20-2-2018

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Ilyo, owner of a hostel. 8-2-2018

<sup>28</sup> Pictures of several statues and the ships can be found in Appendix 3

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Liljana, employee in Skopje City Mall. 31-3-2018

stated that the country should invest in other sectors instead of tourism. Examples are improvements in healthcare, education and employment. Moreover, everyone I spoke to was happier with the old look of the city. The changes have been a waste of money according to many people. This explains their critique on tourism promotion by the government. When it comes to removing the statues, opinions are more mixed. “The statues with more meaning could be relocated”, Marina thinks. “Now that the money is spent, they should not be taken away completely. It would only cost more money the country doesn’t have.”<sup>30</sup> Other informants agree with her that it is too late to remove them now. “Maybe they should have put fewer statues in the city; now they should not change anything”, Vaska said to me.<sup>31</sup> The statues should stay on the streets, just to show the government what they did and “to remember this period in the future”<sup>32</sup>. Despite being against the changes in the first place, people would rather leave them on the streets now that they are there, instead of taking them away. It is not a matter of liking the new look, it is about preventing wasting even more money and reminding people of bad choices made by the government.

Instead of removing the statues, it would be better to relocate them. Other neighbourhoods in Skopje or other cities in Macedonia could use some statues. Currently tourism is centred around Macedonia Square in Skopje and “the area is too crowded with statues”<sup>33</sup>. The other neighbourhoods might profit from tourism if they would have statues. Aneta’s advice is to let experts in architecture and artists think about a plan on how to improve the look of the city and, most importantly, they should look at the economic side of the possible changes.<sup>34</sup> However, these choices are up to the government and the population can only wait to see what happens. The first governmental action was on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2018, when they removed the first statue. To have a positive effect on the population, it would be best to remove the ships in the river because they are the most hated part of the project and are causing floods.

Hearing mainly negative or sceptical attitudes towards Skopje 2014, I wanted to find out what advise the population would give tourists to experience Skopje in a better way. They all listed mainly the same things. They recommend going to the new city centre and the Old Bazar area using the Stone Bridge because it is nice to see the contrast between the two different worlds. Inside the Old Bazar, the Kale Fortress is highly recommended because it is

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Marina, graduate student. 31-3-2018

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Vaska, co-owner of tour organization. 6-3-2018

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Vanco, tour guide at tour organisation. 9-3-2018

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Liljana, employee in Skopje City Mall. 31-1-2018

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Aneta, artist (also making critique art about Skopje 2014). 7-4-2018



a good place to learn about Macedonian history.<sup>35</sup> These places are also visited by locals so tourists will get a real experience of Skopje and Macedonian culture. When it comes to museums, “people should go to the Skopje City Museum because they show the effect of the earthquake”<sup>36</sup>. The Museum of Macedonian Struggle is either “terrifying with the wax figures... Made by the old government to make themselves look better”<sup>37</sup> or, less frequently, liked. To visit nature, people recommended to go to Gradski park or just outside Skopje to canyon Matka and Vodno mountain. The population seems to be on a quest for authenticity rather than liking the changes made to the city. They want tourists to see ‘real’ places and history. One specific advice was that “people should be spending time with locals. Visit local places... get local experiences... try things locals recommend”<sup>38</sup>. This shows that the local population has good intentions towards tourists. They want tourists to have the most ‘real’ experience of the city and they like to be involved with making sure tourists get the best experience. From their point of view, the results of Skopje 2014 should not be the reason for tourists to visit. They should be informed about the other activities the country offers.

Except for the museums, nothing that is recommended by my informants is related to the investments made for Skopje 2014. This shows that the population is critical towards the government and their ways of tourism promotion. Zaei & Zaei (2013) stated that the population of a country can make use of the cultural and social events and of sports and leisure facilities that have been created to attract tourists (15) to benefit from tourism promotion. However, in Skopje this is not the case because people do not like the places and facilities that were created by the government. In case of the museums, locals do not have the money to visit them. According to them, Skopje 2014 was unnecessary and money should have been allocated differently.

The next chapter will discuss how tourism is related to economic development. My informants explained how tourism influences their economic position and how money could be spent differently. This will be used to explain the population’s attitudes.

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Vasa, graduate student and working as a consultant. 6-4-2018

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Ruza, artist (also making critique art about Skopje 2014). 1-4-2018

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Liljana, employee in Skopje City Mall. 31-1-2018

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Vasa, graduate student and working as a consultant. 6-4-2018

## 5. Tourism and Economic Development

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Macedonian government has invested millions of euros in Skopje 2014 to promote tourism. The population questions whether the project was economically worth it, and they are trying to find ways to earn money from the investments and generate economic growth. This chapter will discuss the effects of economic development that might result from tourism. In line with the main question, it is important to include economic benefits because they can be used to explain different attitudes based on employment. “People who are not earning money from tourism experience it as a bad thing, whereas people who do earn money from tourism are more positive”.<sup>39</sup> The following paragraphs will show how this statement can be confirmed and how attitudes depend on different economic effects.

### 5.1 Employment opportunities and income

Due to the increase of tourism, new job opportunities are likely to open. As Ilyo is employed in the tourism sector, he sees employment opportunities that people in other sectors probably do not see. He suggests that the government should have invested money in the creation of new jobs instead of the creation of statues. “Statues; they won’t move from their place ever. They will never get back to work ... They’re not humans, they’re just replicas of something”.<sup>40</sup> The statues generated short-term employment, however, now that they are finished, they will not generate money flow.

Some employment positions that clearly benefit from tourism are restaurants, hotels, hostels and tour organisations. Many hostels could use more employees and the service sector is missing tourist information offices, which are new employment opportunities. If the government would invest in employment opportunities and try to create or promote jobs in the tourism sector, increasing tourism would decrease the unemployment rate and increase the money flow. The current situation, however, is that hotels are part of international chains like Marriott and IBIS. This results in expatriates occupying many of these jobs, instead of the local population. Moreover, the chains are earning money instead of the local population. Additionally, people who work in the tourism sector do earn their money, however, the wages are low and their employment is accompanied by a high workload.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Prof. Pacoska, professor on tourism at Stip University. 9-2-2018

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Ilyo, owner of a hostel. 8-2-2018

People who work in the tourism sector need to be kind, regardless of the behaviour of the person in front of them. Ksenija is the general manager of a big hotel chain and explained to me how her staff works. “Our staff is doing excellent work and offering extras to keep the guests satisfied... However, guests keep pushing limits and there are sometimes incidents in which the staff feels uncomfortable or are insulted by their guests”. She gave an example of a guest who, out of nowhere, started shouting at the receptionist. The receptionist tried to calm him down and to help him solve his ‘problem’. Nothing could get him to his senses. When Ksenija approached him the morning after, he acted as if nothing had happened.<sup>41</sup> Despite being insulted, the receptionist had to stay calm and positive towards the guest. Tourists can be very demanding which could create a distant attitude towards them. Especially if people who work in the tourism sector experience a lot of negative situations, this might influence their attitude negatively. However, employees will almost never let tourists know how they really feel because this might influence their income by getting less tips.

Kalina is a waitress in a restaurant on Macedonia Square and sees a lot of tourists. Whenever tourists ask her to take a picture, she will take multiple pictures to make sure people are satisfied. “I very much enjoy taking pictures of people; trying to get good pictures”. Additionally, she explained to me that waiters are politer to tourists than to locals and make sure that tourists have the best time they can.<sup>42</sup> Being politer to tourists is related to the possibility of getting tips. In Macedonia people do not have a habit of leaving tips in restaurants whereas most tourists generally do. Waiters will do their best to get a nice tip when the guests leave. The same applies to tour guides who generally work in small companies or as freelancers. In Skopje, multiple tours are offered, both organised with fixed prices and tip-based walking tours. Obviously, tour guides can earn more money during the high season because there will be more people on their tours. However, tour-guide Georgi explained to me that people tend to give higher tips when they are in a smaller group.<sup>43</sup> His tours are tip-based, and he gave examples of tours with either 5 guests and with 15 guests, where he would get about the same amount of money. For him, smaller groups are more interesting because it is possible to include the origin of his guests into his tour. Personal attention is key to getting higher tips. In these situations, tourists will generate a higher income for people working in the tourism sector, which has a positive effect on their attitudes.

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Ksenija, general manager of hotel chain. 11-4-2018

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Kalina, waitress on Macedonia Square. 13-4-2018

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Georgi, tour guide of free walking tours. 20-2-2018

The amount of work in the tourism sector depends on the number of tourists in Skopje. Skopje does not have an extreme form of seasonality, however, there is clearly a high season between April and September, with August as peak. “Summer is obviously busier, there are more tourists. In winter, Skopje is not special”.<sup>44</sup> Restaurants state that they would like to hire more people when the high season starts. Despite the high unemployment rate “there are no people looking for a job. They don't want to work”.<sup>45</sup> Multiple people explained to me that Macedonian people detest physical labour and prefer to do no more work than necessary. Moreover, employment in the tourism sector is not taken seriously because income is dependent on external factors. Most people in Skopje complain about their economic position, they just do not try to change it. This almost ‘lazy’ mentality partially explains why people are not looking for a job despite being unemployed. The people who are hardworking generally want to change their position or want to move out of Macedonia which costs a lot of money.

Seasonal effects are visible when looking at street sales for example. During the fieldwork period, from February until April, the number of street vendors doubled. In February they were mainly selling umbrellas and the warmer and sunnier it became; the more they were selling sunglasses. In April they started using small tables to sell magnets, cups and toys.<sup>46</sup> Another example of seasonal changes are the closed hostels. During the fieldwork period many hostels were closed. They decided to close for the winter because there are not that many tourists in wintertime. They would be opening around the beginning of April. During the low season, hostels try to do their renovations and investments to prepare for the high season. Ilyo decided to keep his hostel open all year round. The low season, “it’s a period... when we also balance on ourselves. It’s the time when we can rest because after that you need to start”. In contrast, in summer hostels try to fit in more beds because they are always fully booked. Sometimes they decide to hire more personnel during the summer to spread the workload.<sup>47</sup> For Ilyo and the other employees at his hostel, seasonality is not a negative thing. It gives them time to rest and to prepare themselves for the summer.

Tour guides do not perceive a large difference between the seasons. Georgi sees if there is work from day to day. Despite trying to discover a pattern the past few years, the number of guests at his tour are completely unpredictable and not related to seasonality. Whenever there are too few people at his meeting point before the tour, Georgi decides to

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Nikola, manager of helpdesk. 3-3-2018

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Kalina, waitress on Macedonia Square. 13-4-2018

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Liljana, employee in Skopje City Mall. 31-1-2018

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Ilyo, owner of a hostel. 8-2-2018

collaborate with another tour guide to make sure at least one of them has a decent group to do the tour with.<sup>48</sup>

## 5.2 Increase money flow

It should be logical according to Vasa: “more tourists result in more money of course”. However, it is more complicated to make tourism beneficial for the country and the population. Vasa knows profit does not work that easily in Skopje. When it comes to tourism, “only people who invest money can profit. Others don’t”.<sup>49</sup> Since most tourists stay in the centre of Skopje, only people in that area can profit. It would be better if tourism was spread over different municipalities in the city. “The goal should be to make local people benefit from it”.<sup>50</sup> Currently, no one, except the government and the international hotel chains, really benefits from tourism.

Skopje is the only place in Macedonia where development in tourism has been taking place. For people who are not from Skopje, the development in the city is more visible in comparison with their hometowns. As a result, people from the smaller villages in Macedonia start moving to Skopje. The past years, many people have moved towards the city and half of the Macedonian population is now living in Skopje. Initially the city was built for 400.000 people, while it is currently home to almost 1 million people.<sup>51</sup> People are moving to Skopje because there are not enough jobs in the rural areas they come from. At the same time the population of Skopje is growing faster than the number of jobs. This results in a high unemployment rate and a black market where mainly people from the countryside are earning their money. The people from Skopje feel like they are losing their city to the people from rural areas and become negative towards the changes that have taken place in the city.

Zlatko thinks that the authorities are satisfied by the changing situation. The locals, however, “they see the change, but some more of them they don't like it you know. They didn't expect it you know”.<sup>52</sup> The development that resulted from Skopje 2014 stops at the ‘border’ of the tourist area in Skopje. Ace lives in Aerodrom, a municipality just outside the centre. The two areas are divided by the new train station which represents the border of development in Skopje.<sup>53</sup> This division is another reason why many people do not like the

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<sup>48</sup> Informal conversation with Georgi, tour guide of free walking tours. 15-4-2018

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Vasa, graduate student and working as a consultant. 6-4-2018

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Georgi, tour guide of free walking tours. 15-4-2018

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Iva, waitress. 4-4-2018

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Zlatko, co-owner of a hostel. 12-2-2018

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Ace, graduate student. 3-4-2018

changes by the government. The changes were focussed on the centre where not many people live. If people cannot benefit from the changes, they are less likely to be positive.

Finally, it is questionable whether the increase of tourism did result in an increased flow of money. Mrs Pacoska, an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics in Stip, Macedonia, has done research on the relation between the increase in tourism and the increase in money flow. According to her results the number of tourists did increase during the past years, while at the same time tourists stay shorter and spend less money.<sup>54</sup> Many (foreign) tour operators offer all-inclusive trips to Macedonia, which means the local population does not profit from the tourists who book these holidays. This could result in negative attitudes towards tourists. If these trips were offered by Macedonian tour operators they would benefit the local population more. Additionally, if Skopje would offer more time-consuming activities, tourists would be likely to stay longer and spend more money. This would both be positive for the income of the local population, as well as for the country.

### 5.3 Infrastructural investments

To increase tourism, new flight connections with budget airlines were created.<sup>55</sup> These flight connections benefit both inbound tourism and outbound tourism at the same time because anyone can make use of them. However, once tourists have landed at the airport, the infrastructure could use quite some improvements. The roads in Skopje have been improved recently, however, they were destroyed again by the trucks needed for the construction of the new buildings and statues in the city centre.<sup>56</sup> The trucks were too heavy and used pedestrian streets which created unevenness in the streets.

At the same time, traffic has increased and is causing extreme air pollution in the city. Instead of a highway going around, there are two main roads all the way through the city. I could observe the rush hour right in front of the hostel, in the centre of Skopje. All emissions are concentrated in the city centre which causes extreme air pollution multiple times a year.<sup>57</sup> In the past, the smog would be blown away by a strong wind, however, this wind stream is now blocked by the new buildings around the riverbed. The main causes of the pollution are the number of old cars people are driving and the huge amount of taxi companies. For now, the government has tried to counter this by offering grants to the population on buying a bike

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Prof. Pacoska, professor on tourism at Stip University. 9-2-2018

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Ljupcho, owner of tour organization. 22-2-2018

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Ace, graduate student. 3-4-2018

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Prof. Tomulevski, professor psychology at a private university. 23-3-2018

to promote a healthier lifestyle and to minimize the air pollution the coming years.<sup>58</sup> Having periods of extreme air pollution is negative for tourism because tourists are less likely to travel to polluted places.

To reduce air pollution the public transport also needs to be improved and promoted more. “The city doesn’t offer any information about using public transport and tourists would not use it”.<sup>59</sup> A beginning has been made with new bus lines that were created to bring people to touristic sites like mount Vodno and the Matka canyon. The city bought new double-decker busses to increase the amount of people travelling per ride and to improve the quality of travelling. In addition to this, the idea was proposed to get trolleybuses or other kind of travel on rails to further improve public transport.<sup>60</sup> However, the public transport is missing enforcement. When people in the hostel would ask information about the public transport, the employees would advise the two important busses they could take (to mount Vodno and the Matka canyon). “Don’t bother buying a ticket. You won’t be checked. If you are, they don’t speak any English generally... You’ll get out without a fine”.<sup>61</sup> This shows the lack of enforcement and a missed source of income.

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Ace, graduate student. 3-4-2018

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Vaska, co-owner of tour organization. 6-3-2018

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Prof. Tomulevski, professor psychology at a private university. 23-3-2018

<sup>61</sup> Participant observation in hostel. 4-4-2018

## 6. Tourism and Interactions

Since tourism in Skopje is increasing, more interactions between the local population and tourists can be expected. Interaction has been defined in the theoretical background as “an occasion when two or more people or things communicate with or react to each other”<sup>62</sup>. Interactions can influence local attitudes on tourism according to the contact theory of Allport (1954). When an interaction has a positive outcome prejudice and negative attitudes are likely to decrease and people will feel more positive about interactions in the future. However, when an interaction results in negative feelings, it is likely to influence new interactions in a negative way. The following chapter describes which interactions take place in Skopje between the local population and the tourists and how these interactions influence local attitudes.

### 6.1 Sharing the city

For many tourist destinations there is a fear of tourists taking over the city when the number increases. In 2018 there is an expectation of 1 million tourists coming to Skopje, just as much as the population living there, which could feel as if tourists are taking over the city. However, the tourists are distributed over a year. None of my informants expressed any negative feelings about the increasing number of tourists and they still felt as if the city was theirs. When the number of tourists keeps increasing, the population might start to feel threatened. Tour guide Georgi explained to me that “just 1 million would be a disaster to typical tourist destinations”. In case of Skopje this amount is just right for the moment.<sup>63</sup> Another tour guide stated: “We’re on our way, with an increase of 20% per year Skopje will become more popular”.<sup>64</sup> Tour guides are very happy if the number keeps increasing because this will likely increase their income.

For the people who do not work in the tourism sector, the current situation is alright. There should not be many more tourists because this would influence their lives in Skopje too much. “It’s not the aim to have too many” Vasa thinks.<sup>65</sup> She is a graduate student living in Skopje and is satisfied with the current number of tourists. Too many tourists in the city could make negative effects more visible. Ivana explained to me how she experienced the effects of higher number of tourists. She recalled visiting Ohrid, another city in Macedonia, and feeling

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<sup>62</sup> Cambridge Dictionary online

<sup>63</sup> Informal conversation with Georgi, tour guide of free walking tours. 20-2-2018

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Vanco, tour guide at tour organisation. 9-3-2018

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Vasa, graduate student and working as a consultant. 6-4-2018



as if she was the foreigner in her own country because there were so many tourists on the streets.<sup>66</sup> However, in Skopje she has never experienced such a situation.

One exception was during the UEFA Super Cup final in 2017 that was hosted in Skopje. The city reached the maximum number of tourists it could host, at least at that time, and it was the biggest event Macedonia hosted in the past twenty years. It was a great way to put the country on the international map of tourist destinations. The city was crowded with supporters, all accommodations were fully booked, and the population started offering places on their couch for free, which is one of the examples of the openness of Macedonian people. The population responded to the rising prices of hotels and hostels and wanted everyone to be able to stay and see the match.<sup>67</sup> Besides the match, the population thought visitors should be able to experience more of the city and the culture. Through the website Couchsurfing people met and the population could show their city.<sup>68</sup>

Apart from for the week of the Super Cup, my informants have not experienced an overload of tourists yet. Tourism is very spatially dependent and people living in other municipalities in Skopje do not interact with tourists. Outside the city centre there are not many hotels or activities and thus no tourists. Currently the only place where the population can interact with tourists is in the very centre of the city. Vasa lives quite far from the centre and travels to the other side of the city to work. While transferring busses in the centre, she sees many tourists around the bus stop. She explained to me that she has “never seen any tourists in her neighbourhood”.<sup>69</sup> Ace likes meeting new people and learning about other cultures while at the same time sharing his city. He thinks “there are tourists but not too many. We could use more foreign people”.<sup>70</sup> For Milena, who lives in the Old Bazar area, the increase has been very visible the previous years. “I see them outside and smile to them”. When asking her if she interacts with tourists she sadly answered she did not. However, she “would like it though” because she likes to be “connected to the rest of the world”.<sup>71</sup>

Tourists in Skopje are easily recognised because “they are more often organised in groups and tours are more structured”, as professor Tomulevski stated. Besides, “tourists in any city or country always look as if they are lost”.<sup>72</sup> Macedonian people have quite a distinctive appearance, so Asian and Western European people are easily recognised as non-

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Ivana, student and employee at a hostel. 18-2-2018

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Nikola, manager of helpdesk. 3-3-2018

<sup>68</sup> For more information see: <https://www.couchsurfing.com/>

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Vasa, graduate student and working as a consultant. 6-4-2018

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Ace, graduate student. 3-4-2018

<sup>71</sup> Informal conversation with Milena, high school student and living in the Old Bazar area because she is Albanian. 28-2-2018

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Prof. Tomulevski, professor psychology at a private university. 23-3-2018

natives. Milena explained to me that the older generations might be more negative towards tourists and discriminate based on how people look because they do not often interact with tourists. Especially for people living in other municipalities, attitudes might be based on stories of other people and not grounded on personal experiences.

## 6.2 Creating awareness

Having tourists visit Skopje, and Macedonia in general, makes people more aware of themselves and their origins. This results in a discrepancy within society and even inside individuals. Ilyo explained that there are two main attitudes about tourists coming to Skopje. On one side there are people who say “wow, there are people here, they wanna see our country. It’s very nice. Finally, they come!”. These people are happy to see tourists visiting because they want to share their city with them. They feel proud their city or country is recognised as worth visiting and this gives them a positive feeling. However, on the other side he placed the people who say “what the hell these people are doing here. Why they are coming? There’s nothing to see here”. For these people it is hard to understand why people would come to visit their city. They have negative feelings towards the political and economic situation and they have become blind for the positive sides of their city or country.

Ilyo personally really likes to see tourists in the city. First, he owns a hostel and is thus economically involved. Apart from that he loves to travel and to see other people travel. He believes that people “grow through the experience of travelling itself... It is beneficial for the rest of his life. On more emotional and spiritual and mental aspect. Cultural also I think... When you go through diversity you grow”. He likes to see other people grow through travelling and offers people a good place in his hostel.<sup>73</sup> This is an opinion that is shared by all the employees of hostels that were part of the research. For the people not involved in the tourism sector, tourism is also positive because they like to learn from tourists. Life in Macedonia, and specifically in Skopje is getting boring for the younger generations.<sup>74</sup> Having tourists visiting Skopje “makes the city more fun” because it will be different every day.

The more negative kind of people are just frustrated, Ilyo thinks. It is not that this group of people is negative about tourists visiting their city, they are surprised people want to. They do not know how to deal with “different thoughts, different opinions about anything and

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with Ilyo, owner of a hostel in the centre of Skopje. 8-2-2018

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Nikola, manager of helpdesk. 3-3-2018, Interview with Ace, graduate student. 3-4-2018, Interview with Victor, employee at an IT firm. 9-3-2018

of course about travellers too”.<sup>75</sup> This can be explained by their negative attitude towards the city and the country.

Nikola explained to me how he meets travellers through Couchsurfing and shows them around the city. “I like meeting foreigners and to get to know why they came to Macedonia. Hear their opinions on the city.” Just like Nikola there are many other, especially young, people who are members of the Couchsurfing website so they can meet up with tourists. Zlata thinks it is important that tourists learn about Macedonia and the world finally sees them.<sup>76</sup> It is important that the local people interact with tourists according to Marina. “People need to be with tourists to know them better” and thus see the positive side of their presence. Besides, the local people can learn about the rest of the world through travellers.<sup>77</sup> The next paragraph will explain what effect the interest in the world has on the country.

### 6.3 I want to get out!

During my conversations with younger people in Macedonia I found out that most of them would like to move out of the country. For instance, Nikola, who made clear to me that he is not very positive about the country, nor the city. However, during our interview he said: “I don’t hate my city”. This statement surprised me because I did not expect it would be important for him to share this with me. For now, he is alright with living in Macedonia. He longs to leave the country because of the lack of opportunities that are offered to the younger generation. A ‘normal’ full-time income in Macedonia is between €150, - and €250, - monthly, which is only sufficient for a household when two people are working full-time. With the current political situation this is will not change soon so the population rather immigrates than wait for change in Macedonia. For this reason, Nikola’s girlfriend recently moved to Germany. However, Nikola is not yet ready to make the decision.<sup>78</sup>

Having tourists in Skopje makes the population, especially the younger generation, aware of the rest of the world. For instance, Iva, who is a waitress in the centre of Skopje, sees a lot of different people pass by. “There’s no jealousy” she told me. I just “want to be like them, they have good culture, character”. She was negative about living in Macedonia and would rather move to Germany. Additionally, she joked about moving to New Zealand because they subsidize gay couples who want to move there, the only thing missing was a

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Ilyo, owner of a hostel in the centre of Skopje. 8-2-2018

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Zlata, waitress at a bar in the Old Bazar area. 8-4-2018

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Marina, graduate student. 31-3-2018

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Nikola, manager of helpdesk. 3-3-2018

girlfriend.<sup>79</sup> Although Iva was joking, she was serious about wanting to leave the country and she would use any opportunity offered.

Within the population of Skopje there is a lot of interest in the rest of the world. This can be explained by their aspiration to get out of the country. By learning about other cultures and countries through tourists, they find out what the rest of the world has to offer. They start to compare themselves to other people and pretend to be better or richer than they are to fit in. Most of Liljana's friends have already left the country and she will be moving soon as well.<sup>80</sup> She applied for an internship to start a life in Germany with the aspiration to stay there and improve her living situation.

#### 6.4 Dogs, tourists and locals

There is just one population that only sees the positive side of tourists in Skopje<sup>81</sup>:

*It's 10 in the morning and I'll be doing an organised walking tour around the city today. We're surrounded by 10 street dogs barking for our attention. On the square and around the fountain there are at least 20 more dogs. Once the tour starts the dogs follow us around the city. On our way through the city the dogs start running after driving cars and barking at them. Georgi says, "the dogs are barking because they want to scare the cars away from the people they are following, that's us today." Apparently, the dogs see it as their duty to protect us against the cars. They gave a good example when we crossed at a traffic light and they formed a line across the street facing the cars.*

*Once we visit one of the mosques in the bazar the dogs become a problem. The people there start shouting at Georgi because they think the dogs are his. He can't do anything to make the dogs go away and at the same time depends on the walk through the garden of the mosque for his tour. Eventually most dogs kept were outside and some managed to run through and wait for us at the other exit.*

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Iva, waitress. 4-4-2018

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Liljana, employee in Skopje City Mall. 31-3-2018

<sup>81</sup> Observations of a free walking tour. 27-3-2018

*Even though Georgi is doing his tour at least once a day, sometimes even twice, the shop owners in the bazar blame him for bringing the dogs. People around are getting angry and he starts to become desperate to find a way to keep dogs from his tours.*

Skopje has hundreds of street dogs who found out that they are treated better by tourists than by the local population. As the example above shows, the dogs always follow groups of people because most groups in Skopje are filled with tourists. The dogs become protective and start barking at objects that can form a threat to the tourists. Despite being protective towards tourists, my informants stated that they fear the dogs because “you never know if they are violent”.<sup>82</sup> In general, the dogs only attack the cars. However, in some cases bikes and even runners trigger them as well. The dogs see every fast-moving object, or human, as a threat. This sometimes results in people being bit and getting angry. One example is of a man passing the walking tour on his bike. A dog got triggered and bit his leg. This man got extremely angry and wanted to kick the dog. Once the dog ran away the man picked up stones and started throwing them at the dog.<sup>83</sup> This is just one case of violence towards dogs. Daily, people yell at the dogs, throw trash at them and try to kick them when they get close. This only proves to the dogs that locals cannot be trusted and that they threaten them. The local population at their turn is either scared of or angry at the dogs. The tourists are caring and feel sorry for the dogs.

As mentioned in the theoretical background, Doğan (1989) stated that the absence of strong interpersonal relationships attenuates the influence of the tourists on the hosts (220). In line with this argument, there is misunderstanding between the local population and the tourists regarding the dogs. From a local perspective the dogs are dangerous, and tourists are the ones who can be blamed for the dogs staying alive. If tourists would not feed them, they would starve to death and the problem is solved. However, for tourists it is hard to understand how the local population feels about the dogs.

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Ace, graduate student. 3-4-2018

<sup>83</sup> Observations of a free walking tour. 27-3-2018

## 7. Discussion and Conclusion

Tourism in Skopje increased over the past 5-10 years. The government claims that the increase is the result of Skopje 2014. The changing environment of Skopje made it interesting to pay attention to the attitudes of the local population concerning tourism and tourism promotion. The aim of this research was to formulate an answer to the main research question: *“What are the factors that influence the attitudes of the population of Skopje towards tourism and tourism promotion?”*. This conclusion will sum up the main lines of argumentation from the literature and the fieldwork to create links between different influences on attitudes. Moreover, I will propose some suggestions for follow up research.

The local population is very critical about the effects Skopje 2014 had on the city. This can partially be explained by the political situation in Macedonia that resulted in a polarization of people and suppression of the opposition. The attitudes towards tourism promotion policies depend heavily on the attitudes towards the government in general, and people are therefore very negative. To get support from the population it is important to minimize the negative effects of tourism promotion (Doğan, 1989: 227) and to create more direct benefits for the population. My informants all stated that they never expressed their opinions about the project because they were scared the government would find out, arrest and convict them. This can be explained by a background on the political organization of a country based on Doğan (1989). The Macedonian government is most comparable to one party ruling, which predicts the caution of the local population to express their opinion regarding Skopje 2014 and the act of the government to suppress the opposition.

Apart from being negative towards the government, my informants expressed their criticism on Skopje 2014. The project aimed to make Skopje more attractive to tourists and to promote national pride (Graan, 2013: 161) by creating statues and buildings. According to Duffield (1982) a strong cultural identity can attract tourists (254). However, in case of Skopje, my informants think that statues do not create tourism and the government should not claim they do. The growth in tourism and the implementation of the project coincided. This does not mean there is a causal relationship. It would be interesting to do comparative research on the effect statues can have as tourism promotion.

The population of Skopje thinks there are way too many statues and they do not match the style of the rest of the city and country. The government recreated tourist activities from other countries which resulted in Skopje being called the ‘capital of kitsch’, ‘Disneyland’ and ‘mini-Vegas’. This is comparable to what Urbanowicz (in Smith, 2012) stated about tourists

on a quest for authenticity who often find a “phony-folk-culture” or a “Disneyland” at their holiday destination (113). The current look of the city shocks tourists and is made fun of. On one hand this is useful as promotion for the city. However, on the other, the population is not proud of their country. The city is not taken seriously for its existing cultural richness, which might keep tourists from visiting. Further research could be done to find out how Skopje can benefit from their position as the capital of kitsch.

Just like tourists, the population of Skopje is on a quest for authenticity. According to my informants Skopje 2014 does not represent Macedonian culture. They think the old look of the city was better and did not need any changes. The old town had spirit and that spirit disappeared when they started Skopje 2014. There is nostalgia to the old look of the city, which is expressed by disliking the results of Skopje 2014. The project is perceived as a waste of money because it was unnecessary and the investments were of bad quality. The government should look at what the country has to offer, instead of creating new activities. Zaei & Zaei argue that it does not matter whether this environment is natural or built as long as it looks attractive for tourists (2013: 19). However, the population thinks that statues and buildings should not be the reason tourists visit their city and they see it as their responsibility to make sure tourists see the ‘real’ places and history of Macedonia. They strongly recommend tourists to do things that have nothing to do with the project. It would be interesting to do further research on how existing cultural richness can be used to attract tourists

Choi & Sirakaya (2005) expressed the importance of involving residents in the process of development and tourism planning. This could result in more positive attitudes towards tourism promotion (380-381). People in Skopje expressed the importance of being involved in developing the city. However, they never were involved which limited their benefits from tourism. They would have liked the city better if, for example, a more complete history was presented. Additionally, artists should have had the opportunity to produce art as result of their personal creative process instead of following instructions from the government. A huge misstep was made by the government when they changed the law that prohibited constructing along the riverbed. Apart from having respect for and keeping in mind the interests of the local population, it is important to respect the environment where tourism is planned (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005: 382). The Macedonian government clearly did not respect the environment by changing this law and it will probably lead to flooding and damage done by the river. It would be interesting to do a follow up research to find out how political actors think about their own actions and tourism promotion.

Investing in sustainable local facilities like infrastructure, education and healthcare could be used to gain support from the local population. Additionally, if the population can make use of the cultural and social events and of sports and leisure facilities, that have been created to attract tourists, they might be more positive (Zaei & Zaei, 2013: 15). However, in Macedonia the investments were mainly in statues and buildings and do not benefit the local population. They do not like the places and facilities that were created by the government and do not make use of anything. The population of Skopje does not experience development.

Meanwhile, people from the rural areas keep moving to Skopje and are crowding the city. They experienced inequality towards the population of Skopje seen from their rural areas. Rural areas are supported less, and the population feels deprived, which is similar to what Mullins (1992) and Archer et al (2005) mentioned in their articles. They expect to end up with better circumstances and more stability if they start living in the popular cities (Mullins, 1992: 188). Unfortunately, development in Skopje only took place in the city centre and there are not enough jobs available which results in a higher unemployment rate.

The population of Skopje is trying to create personal benefit by working in the tourism sector. Employment in the tourism sector is the only way for the local population to increase their income. Increasing tourism in Skopje is likely to result in the creation of new jobs (Zaei & Zaei, 2013: 17). However, these jobs are not promoted, and despite the high unemployment rate, people do not want to work in the tourism sector. People who are employed in the tourism sector are generally more positive than those who do not earn their money from tourism. Only a small part of the population benefits from tourism as Doğan stated (1989: 218). Further research could be done to find out how a bigger part of the population can profit from tourism without working in the tourism sector.

Pi-Sunyer (2012) argues that local attitudes towards tourism are partially based on personal experiences with tourists (189). Especially people working in the tourism sector interact with tourists on a regular basis. Initially these interactions are based on economic gain (Doğan, 1989: 218) for the population, so they will give tourists the best time possible to increase the likeliness of receiving a tip. However, almost all informants stated they would like to have more personal contact with tourists. They believe this is beneficial for an individual's development to meet different people and to reduce prejudice. Especially younger people stated that they like interacting with tourists, which is similar to what Doğan (1989) stated. They are very positive about meeting new people, showing their city to the world and learning about other cultures. Having more tourists in Skopje makes the population more aware of themselves and their origins. Many people are internationally oriented and



have become sceptic towards living in Macedonia. They would rather move out of the country than stay. It would be interesting to do further research on how the local population can meet tourists and how tourism is causing people to leave the country.

The research shows one clash between the population and the tourists, which is regarding the street dogs. Doğan (1989) stated that the absence of strong interpersonal relationships attenuates the influence of the tourists on the hosts (220). In case of the street dogs, there is no understanding between tourists and the local population. Tourists are perceived as the main reason the dogs are still alive because they feed them. The population, however, is scared and would rather see them off the streets. It would be interesting and useful to learn more about the situation and to solve the problem with street dogs, for example by changing tourist behaviour or taking better care of the dogs.

Attitudes towards tourists and tourism promotion are dependent on different factors as was described before. These factors explain why people have different attitudes and how their attitudes can change. In case of tourism promotion, financial benefit is the most important predictor of attitudes. The population of Skopje has a more positive attitude when they benefit directly from a situation. This explains why people working in the tourism sector are, overall, more positive than people who work in other sectors. Financial benefit creates an interest in the changes. The changes, however, do not create an interest in tourism. Nearly all my informants stated that they do not like or make use of any tourist facilities that were created so they do not have any positive effect on their attitudes. The changes in the city created more negative attitudes. However, there is a distinction between attitudes towards tourism promotion and tourists. If people perceive interactions with tourists as beneficial, they can be expected to be more positive towards tourists. Interactions benefit the population of Skopje by sharing experiences and learning about other cultures. The people in Skopje are very open and interested in tourists and the rest of the world. It is possible to intensify contact between tourists and the population to improve attitudes.

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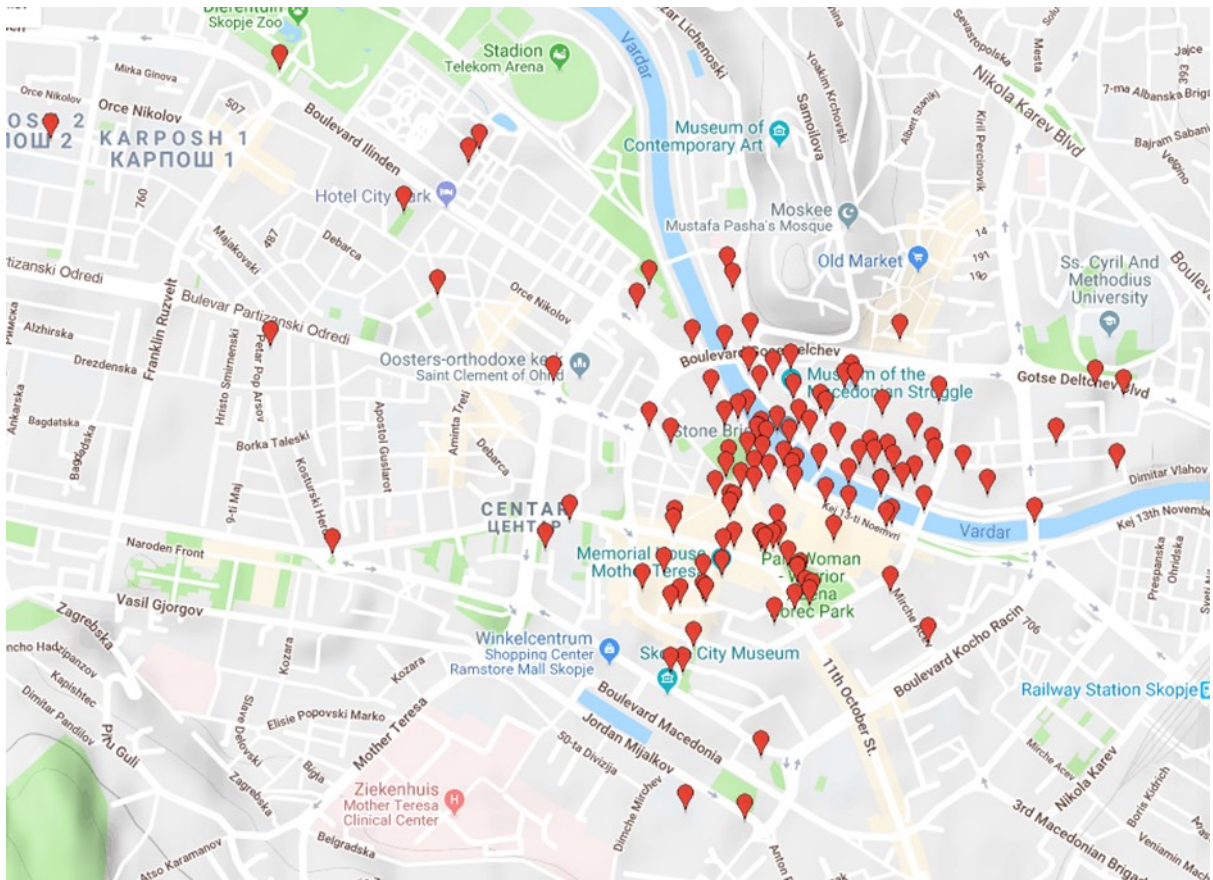
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## Appendix 1: Spatial distribution of Skopje 2014<sup>84</sup>

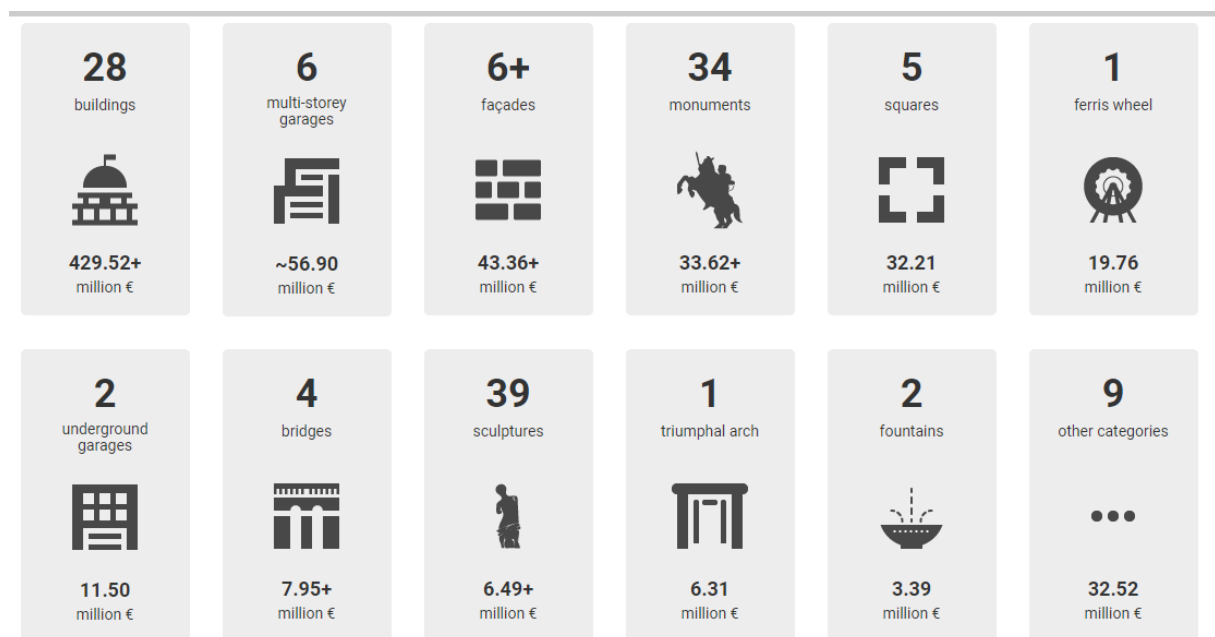
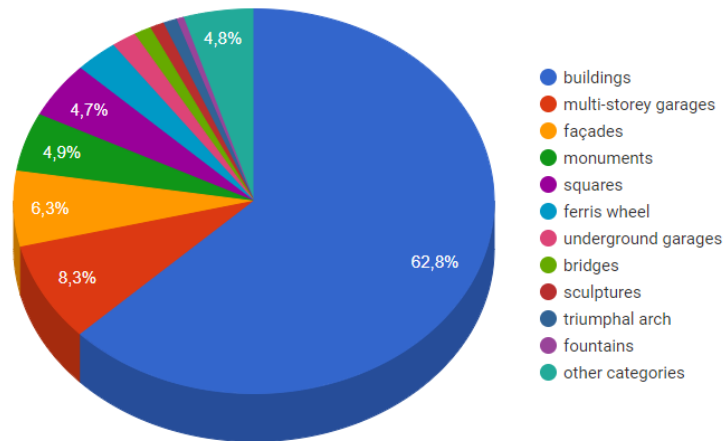


This map shows how the structures that were part of Skopje 2014 are distributed over the city. The focus is on the southern (new) part of the city centre and a minority is placed across the river, in the Old Bazar area. Some individual structures can be found in other neighbourhoods.

<sup>84</sup> Data was found on <http://skopje2014.prizma.birm.eu.com/en>. Accessed June 18, 2018

## Appendix 2: Financial distribution of Skopje 2014<sup>85</sup>

### Distribution of finances for Skopje 2014 according to type of structure



The pie-chart above shows what things the money was spend on. Beneath you see the ‘exact’ price of the structures in combination with the number of structures build with that amount of money.

<sup>85</sup> Data was found on <http://skopje2014.prizma.birn.eu.com/en>. Accessed June 18, 2018

### Appendix 3: Illustrative Photographs



I took this picture the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2018 while taking a walking tour around the city. We just walked into the Old Bazar area and the dogs had been following us for at least an hour. We were with a group of ten people and there was at least an equal number of dogs following us.





I took this picture while walking along the river the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2018. This is one of the four ships causing the changing flow of the river. The ships are used as restaurants and hotels. They were not made of the right (sustainable) material because the chemicals in the river are damaging the lower part of the ship which is causing leakage.





This picture, taken on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, shows how crowded the city centre is with statues. Both statues are placed on fountains which are filled with more statues. At this square there are two more fountains and multiple other statues. These two fountains are at one end of the Stone Bridge and represent motherhood, with the mother of Alexander the Great, in the front and fatherhood, with Alexander's father Philip II of Macedon, in the back. Across the river is the Warrior on a Horse statue, representing Alexander the Great.



This picture, taken the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2018, is the most expensive structure of Skopje 2014. Alexander the Great's the statue may not be called after him and is called Warrior on a Horse because of the Greece-Macedonia dispute about his heritage.





This art piece was sent to me and made by Aneta. This is a collection of postcards with critique on Skopje 2014. They show pictures of the changes in the city followed by spot-on quotes. Three examples are shown on the next page.



These postcards are part of an art piece of Aneta. Apart from these three there were three more carrying the following statements; Creating a new, older Skopje; Building history. Literally; Every corner matters. No citizen does

## Appendix 4: Summary

Summary of the thesis written by Eva van Uunen

Van Uunen, E.M.

2018 ‘Millions in Marble: Local attitudes towards tourism in Skopje.’

This thesis discusses the factors that influence attitudes towards tourism in Skopje. In the past few years, the Macedonian government has implemented Skopje 2014 to attract more tourists to the city. At the same time the number of tourists increased. It is, however, questioned by the population if the project caused the increase. The findings that are discussed are based on ten weeks of fieldwork, conducted between the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2018 and the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2018. The aim of the research was to find out how the population of Skopje experiences the changes made to their city to attract tourists and how they feel about the increasing number of tourists. One of my goals was to find out what circumstances and effects influence the attitudes of local population. This was done by including both people who work in the tourism sector and people work in other sectors. Another goal was to make the local people feel comfortable talking about, for them, sensitive subjects. It turned out that people in Skopje are very sceptic towards the government and at the same time do not express their criticism out of fear to be arrested. The main research question of the thesis is: *“What are the factors that influence the attitudes of the population of Skopje towards tourism and tourism promotion?”* A separation was made between Skopje 2014, economic development and interactions as influences on attitudes.

The first way to explain the attitudes of the local population are tourism promotion policies. The most significant explanation is related to Skopje 2014. This project started around 2010 and was supposed to create a new look for the city that would attract more tourists. Attitudes towards the project are quite negative because the population is critical about anything the government does. My informants expressed four main attitudes regarding Skopje 2014. First, statues do not create tourism, contrary to what the government thought Skopje 2014 would do. The number of structures is experienced as an overload which created an image of being the capital of kitsch, Disneyland and mini-Vegas. Tourists are making fun of the current look of the city, this, in a way, works as tourism promotion. However, this was not how the government planned to increase tourism. The population also has other reasons to be critical towards the new look of the city. The structures do not represent Macedonian

culture according to them. There are no references to the period of 500 years Ottoman rule, the Second World War and the independence of Macedonia in 1991. Instead they created sculptures of people that are not even known by the local population and they recreated highlights of other tourist destinations. The project resulted in approximately 136 buildings, statues and other structures and are almost all bad quality. My informants stated that the statues were unnecessary and thus cost way too much because the country and city already offered enough tourist activities before the start of Skopje 2014.

Regardless of the present cultural richness, the government invested millions of euros in Skopje 2014. The local population is critical towards the economic growth it would generate as it only benefits people who are employed in the tourism sector. The increase in tourism could provide new employment opportunities. However, these jobs are not promoted by the government and the people who are unemployed are not willing to take these jobs. Employment in the tourism sector asks for a lot of patience because tourists can be very demanding. Moreover, some positions are only available during the high season which leaves some people unemployed the rest of the year. People who work in other sectors do not experience much of the economic development resulting from the increase in tourism. Development only took place in the city centre of Skopje, which is just a small part of the city. None of the other municipalities were included in the developments. Money could have been spent much better if it was invested in education and healthcare for example. Then it would benefit the complete population. Only recently the government started investing in public transport to minimize the air pollution, which can scare tourists from coming to Skopje.

The local population is most positive about contact with tourists. Despite the increasing number, they never feel as if tourists are taking over the city. In comparison with other cities, Skopje does not have a lot of tourists. However, the past few years there has been a steady increase. The population would like to see more tourists come to their city and they are very open to meet new people. Especially young people like to meet tourists because this gives them the opportunity to learn about the rest of the world without travelling. Part of the population is surprised about tourists wanting to visit their city. This can be explained by the negative attitude towards their own country. Nevertheless, interacting with tourists is perceived as positive for an individual's development on different aspects of life. Having tourists come to Skopje makes the city more fun to live in. however, interactions with tourists makes the local population more aware of their own situation in Macedonia in comparison to the rest of the world. Especially the younger generations would like to leave the country and

improve their living standards. Tourism in Macedonia thus result in the immigration of the population. Finally, there is just one reason the local population is less positive towards tourists in their city. Skopje has a lot of street dogs and the local population would rather see them dead. However, the tourists like the dogs and feed them which prevents them from dying. Misunderstanding regarding the dogs sometimes leads to conflict.

All attitudes depend on the personality and the daily life of the people that were part of the research. However, it can be concluded that the local population was more positive when they could benefit from tourism, preferably directly. Overall, the local population is more critical about Skopje 2014 and the economic development the increase of tourism is supposed to generate. It is more difficult for the population to create benefit from tourism promotion. Moreover, employment in the tourism sector is not experienced as truly beneficial. Towards tourists as people, attitudes are more positive. Interactions can be beneficial for anyone who is open to meet tourists.

## Appendix 5: Reflection

There are multiple parts of the research to reflect on; to start with my position as researcher. I have been in my field of research the whole period and was never able to step out. While writing the thesis I found out that I had created my own attitudes and beliefs that were hard to put aside. This was the first moment I missed having a partner who would tell me to be more reflexive. In the field it was hard to turn off the research mode because everything and everyone could be part of my research. During this research I liked to be surrounded by my research context which meant I was living in a hostel. As I was staying in the hostel long term, I could get to know the employees and it gave me a good experience of employment in the tourism sector. The only ones, within the tourism sector, I could build rapport with, were the people in the hostel. All the other people I spoke to were living from day to day and did not have time to meet more often.

In future research I would choose a smaller and more delineated research population and decide to live outside of the field. This will give me the opportunity to turn off the research mode. If I would do the research again, I would not have chosen the same research question. The question I chose is made it hard to include ethnographic descriptions because they never seemed to fit in the subject. It was very interesting to investigate attitudes, however, this made it more difficult to find main argumentation lines. It was difficult and nonetheless important to include different people in the research. Looking back at the research I would have liked to include political actors, who could possibly explain why they made certain changes. I decided not to include them in this research because of a bad experience at the Embassy and based on what my informants said to me about politics.

Secondly, I initially did not expect that my research would discuss a touchy or sensitive subject. Nevertheless, people in Macedonia usually do not share their opinion regarding politics because no one cares about what they say. Just a couple of years ago, people were suppressed and arrested when they would express certain opinions. During the previous elections people could get fired from their job if they were supporting the wrong political party. I could see that some of my informants were still slightly scared and not totally honest in their answers. Some of my informants stated that they observed how their environment has changed and almost never expressed their opinions about this. The population is very hesitant when it comes to expressing their attitudes towards the government. In some cases, it was a challenge to make people feel comfortable talking about their opinion. Many people mentioned corruption in our conversations. Some results do



suggest corruption among the politicians. However, there is, obviously, no evidence for this. I found it hard to deal with this knowledge without including it (implicitly) in my empirical results.

Thirdly, I must reflect on the period the research has taken place in. The period was during the low season of tourism in Skopje which means that research done in any other period of the year could lead to different results. People working in the tourism sector were more willing to participate since they are not spending time during which they should have been working. Besides, their opinions might have been more thought through and more honest than they would be when they are all stressed out by the large amount of work waiting for them. For the people living in the touristic centre of Skopje the opinions might also be different than during the high season. During the high season, they might be more negative because the tourists are overcrowding their city. However, their opinions are probably still based on experiences during the high season because they do not interact with tourists all the time. In future research I would like to have an equal distribution of weeks over the high and low season so I can explain differences.

Finally, I loved being in the field and getting to know new people every day. I really enjoyed talking with people and learning about their different opinions. I'm a very talkative person so this never caused any problems. The fieldwork helped me develop a better skill of doing interviews. Asking questions and responding to the answers given by my informants worked out great. However, I had more trouble remembering what they said or taking notes at the same time. Apart from interviews I did participant observation while taking walking tours and living in the hostel. These moments gave context to what people would tell me.

