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SPATIAL PLANNING IN GEOGRAPHICAL REVIEWS (1962–2025): A BIBLIOMETRIC AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Spatial planning is a system of comprehensive planning and organization aimed at achieving an optimal balance across multiple dimensions. Despite being an interdisciplinary and increasingly relevant field, there is a lack of studies analyzing the specific content and focus of spatial planning research, particularly at the national level in North Macedonia. To address this gap, this study examines the development of spatial planning research in the Republic of North Macedonia through an analysis of papers published in *Geographical Reviews* between 1962 and 2025. A bibliometric approach, combined with manual thematic classification, was applied to identify publication trends, authorship patterns, and the main research themes. The analysis reviewed all 58 issues of the journal, resulting in the identification of 43 scientific papers directly related to spatial planning. Papers were identified using relevant keywords in titles, abstracts, and, when necessary, the full text. The selected papers were classified according to their thematic focus into several categories, including land use, population, settlements, infrastructure, rural planning, urban planning, environment, tourism, and other relevant topics.

The temporal analysis indicates that the volume of spatial planning research within *Geographical Reviews* was not uniform throughout the analyzed period. The highest research output occurred during the 1980s, reflecting a period of intensified research activity, whereas the period between 2010 and 2019 experienced a decline in research output. More recent years demonstrate an increase in publications, indicating renewed scientific attention to spatial planning issues. The thematic analysis revealed a predominance of studies on urban planning and environmental topics, followed by research on tourism and socio-geographical aspects of space.

The conducted research confirms the important role of *Geographical Reviews* in documenting the evolution of spatial planning research and geographical thought in North Macedonia. Considering the increasing importance of sustainable spatial development,

environmental protection, and contemporary urban challenges, further growth in scientific research on spatial planning is anticipated.

Keywords: spatial planning, *Geographical Reviews*, bibliometric analysis, thematic analysis, North Macedonia

INTRODUCTION

According to Nadin and Stead (2008), spatial planning is embedded in institutional arrangements through which governments influence spatial development, with planning systems reflecting broader socio-economic and political contexts. Although spatial planning is, both in theoretical and practical terms, a relatively young scientific discipline, its roots extend far into the past (Zikov, 2005).

Spatial planning arose from the basic requirements of existence, security, and organized settlement. Over time, it evolved beyond immediate functional or defensive concerns, and by the 19th and 20th centuries, the focus shifted toward organized urban growth, infrastructure development, and social welfare, driven by industrialization, population growth, and emerging environmental awareness. In the Republic of North Macedonia, urban and spatial planning has a relatively short tradition. During the first half of the 20th century, urban plans were primarily developed for the country's larger cities. Following the 1963 Skopje earthquake, intensive urban planning activities were undertaken by the Skopje Urban Planning Service, supported by the United Nations and numerous countries involved in the reconstruction of the capital city. The first systematic spatial planning activities began in the 1970s with the establishment of the Directorate for Spatial Planning, which later developed into an Institute (Zikov, 2005). After gaining independence in 1991 and the transformation of the socialist system into a market-oriented economy, a new phase in spatial planning began (Ivanišević et al., 2021). As a sovereign state, North Macedonia assumed responsibility for directing spatial planning strategies and for organizing, utilizing, and protecting space over the long term (Zikov, 2005). Today, these responsibilities are primarily coordinated by the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, which represents the central governmental institution responsible for spatial planning at the national level.

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research method that systematically analyses scientific publications to identify research trends, influential authors, and the intellectual structure of a research field (Donthu et al., 2021). Recent studies illustrate its effectiveness: Zheng et al. (2023) used keyword co-occurrence analysis to examine the knowledge structure and research trends in the scientific literature on urban community garden systems; Rosni et al. (2017) employed keyword-based literature retrieval followed by the selection and classification of journal articles related to urban sprawl; Shao et al. (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis of research on urban ecosystem services; Mehari and Genovese (2023) analyzed the land use planning literature using citation analysis and keyword co-occurrence

analysis; Liu et al. (2023) employed a combined machine learning and bibliometric approach to analyse research on land use change detection; and Sanchez and Afzalan (2017) identified the knowledge structure of urban planning research. These studies highlight how bibliometric methods provide insights into the development and evolution of scientific research. Although bibliometric studies often rely on specialized software or databases, the method can equally be applied through careful manual data collection and organization, as demonstrated in this study.

Despite the growing application of bibliometric analysis globally, there has been no comprehensive overview of publications on spatial planning within the Macedonian context, particularly in *Geographical Reviews*, which has served as a key platform for documenting theoretical and methodological developments in the field. To address this gap, this paper employs a bibliometric approach, screening and analyzing articles published between 1962 and 2025. The methodological approach adopted in this study was inspired by the bibliometric framework applied by Yang et al. (2023) and adapted to the specific context of a single national geographical journal. Accordingly, the study focuses on the temporal development of scientific production, the thematic structure of published research, and potential future directions of spatial planning studies within the Macedonian geographical community. The following research questions were formulated: (1) What are the trends in the production of spatial planning literature? (2) What are the main research themes and hotspots in the field, and how have they developed over time? (3) What are the potential directions for future research in spatial planning?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data

This study focuses on the representation of spatial planning in *Geographical Reviews*, the official journal of the Macedonian Geographical Society, published annually. The journal features scientific articles, contributions, geographic news, information, and book reviews related to geography. While its primary focus is on North Macedonia, articles covering other regions are also included. *Geographical Reviews* has a long-standing tradition, with its first issue published in 1962. In total, there are 13 double editions, which account for 26 individual issues, along with 32 single editions, bringing the total number of issues to 58, all of which are counted separately in this study. All articles were retrieved from the official online archive of *Geographical Reviews* (https://igeografija.mk/reviews/archives) and, when necessary, from the print volumes at the library of the Institute of Geography, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Skopje.

METHODOLOGY

Bibliometric analysis provides quantitative methods for evaluating research performance and mapping the intellectual development, thematic evolution, and collaboration patterns of scientific fields (Borgman and Furner, 2002; Bornmann, 2014; Campbell et al., 2010). This study applies a bibliometric approach combined with manual thematic classification to examine the representation and development of spatial planning research in *Geographical Reviews* over time.

The selection of articles followed an adapted PRISMA-based procedure designed for single-journal bibliometric studies. All items published in *Geographical Reviews* between 1962 and 2025 were initially identified and subsequently screened according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The screening process distinguished between scientific and non-scientific content, followed by relevance screening focused specifically on spatial planning topics. The selection process is presented in Figure 1.

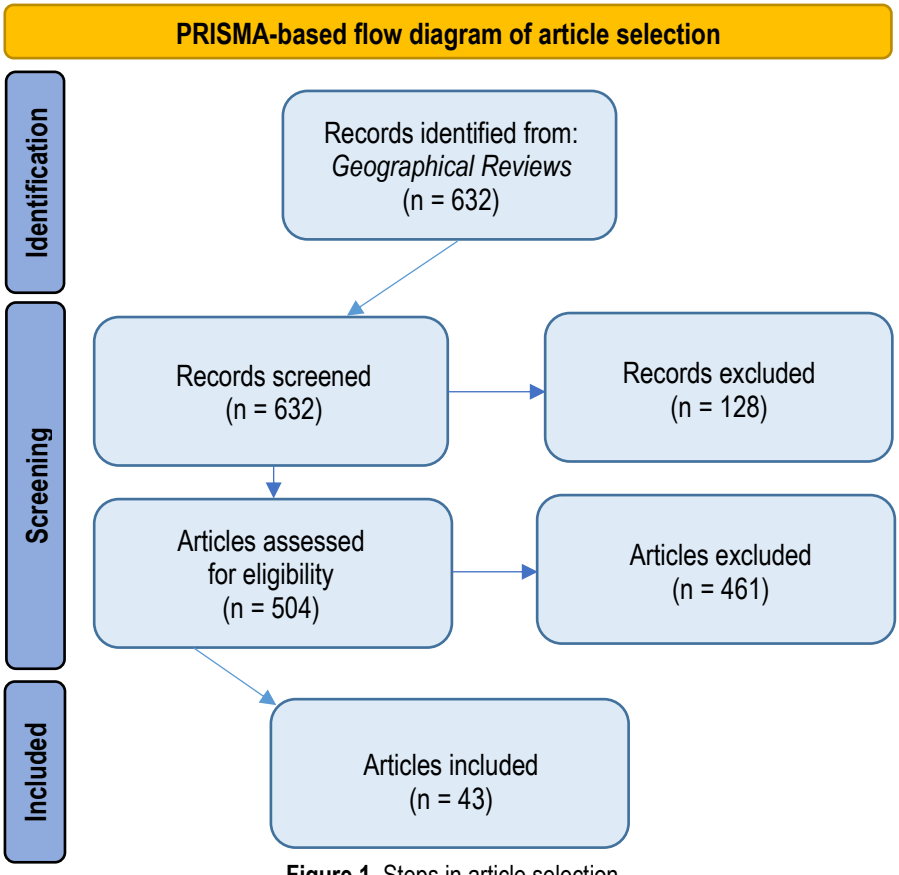


Figure 1. Steps in article selection
Source: authors' own elaboration

The PRISMA flow diagram shows that a total of 632 records were identified for the period 1962–2025. In the first screening phase, 128 records were excluded, primarily consisting of short geographical reviews, chronicles, news items, bibliographies, society reports and activities, anniversary articles, and in memoriam sections. The remaining 504 publications were classified as scientific papers and were further analyzed. A predefined set of keywords relevant to spatial planning was compiled, based on existing literature and standard terminology in the field. The keywords included: “spatial planning”, “land use”, “urban planning”, “space utilization”, and “space organization”. All 504 articles were screened for the presence of these keywords in titles, abstracts, and, where necessary, full texts. In the final phase, 43 articles were identified as having a primary focus on spatial planning. For the selected articles, bibliometric information was collected, including publication year, author(s), article title, and thematic sub-focus within spatial planning. This data allowed for quantitative and qualitative analysis of trends over time.

To assess changes and developments across decades, the articles were grouped into the following periods: 1962–1969, 1970–1979, 1980–1989, 1990–1999, 2000–2009, 2010–2019, and 2020–2025. This decade-based categorization facilitated the identification of long-term trends and shifts in research focus.

RESULTS

Temporal distribution of spatial planning articles

To examine the temporal trends in spatial planning research, all issues of *Geographical Reviews* published between 1962 and 2025 were analyzed. Table 1 summarizes the number of journal issues published in each period and the number of articles focused on spatial planning. This overview provides a foundation for understanding the evolution of spatial planning research within the journal over time.

Table 1. Number of journal issues and spatial planning articles per defined period

Defined period	No. of issues published	No. of spat. planning articles
1st period (1962–1969)	7	5
2nd period (1970–1979)	10	7
3rd period (1980–1989)	10	13
4th period (1990–1999)	7	4
5th period (2000–2009)	9	7
6th period (2010–2019)	9	3
7th period (2020–2025)	6	4
Total	58	43

Source: authors’ own elaboration

In the first defined period (1962–1969), seven journal issues were published, containing five articles related to spatial planning. During the second period (1970–1979), ten issues were published and the number of spatial planning articles increased to seven. This upward trend continued during the third period (1980–1989), which also comprised ten issues and recorded the highest number of spatial planning articles (13) within the entire study period.

In the fourth defined period (1990–1999), seven journal issues were published, containing a total of only four articles focused on spatial planning. The fifth period (2000–2009) experienced a modest increase in spatial planning research, with a total of seven articles published across nine journal issues. In contrast, the sixth period (2010–2019) recorded the lowest number of spatial planning articles, with only three publications despite nine journal issues being released. Notably, from 2016 to 2022, no articles on this topic were published, emphasizing the substantial decline in research activity during this period.

The most recent period (2020–2025) includes six journal issues and four articles related to spatial planning. Compared with the previous decade, the results suggest a partial recovery in the representation of spatial planning topics within the journal.

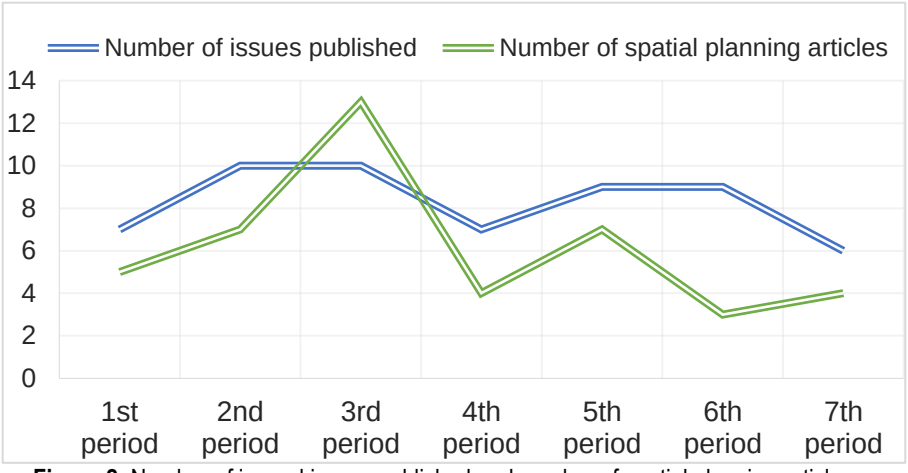


Figure 2. Number of journal issues published and number of spatial planning articles per defined period **Source:** authors' own elaboration

Figure 2 illustrates temporal trends in the number of journal issues and spatial planning articles across the seven periods. While the number of published issues remained relatively stable over the decades, the number of spatial planning articles has fluctuated significantly. The green curve exceeds the blue curve only in the third period (1980–1989), indicating a peak in academic interest in the field. On the other hand, the sixth period (2010–2019) exhibits a significant decline in research activity. The most recent period (2020–2025) indicates a modest increase in publication output, suggesting a renewed interest in spatial planning research within the journal.

Authorship analysis

A notable characteristic of spatial planning research in *Geographical Reviews* is the predominance of single-author papers, particularly among the older publications. Out of the 43 articles identified as related to spatial planning, only five were co-authored, indicating a largely individual research practice during the analyzed period. Figure 3 presents the eight most productive authors who published two or more papers on spatial planning. This overview highlights the key contributors to the development of spatial planning within the Macedonian geographical community.

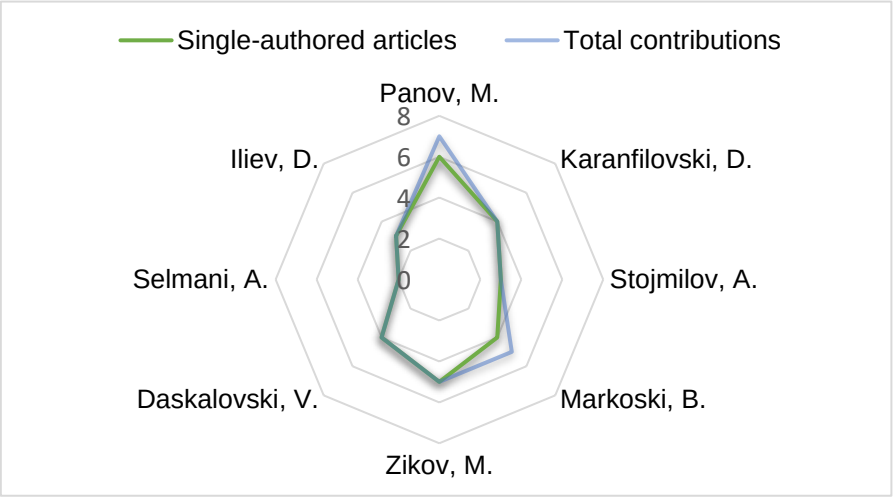


Figure 3. Authorship distribution of spatial planning articles in *Geographical Reviews*
Source: authors' own elaboration

The analysis of authorship patterns indicates that Mitko Panov was the most productive contributor to spatial planning research in *Geographical Reviews*, with a total of seven articles. He is followed by Mihailo Zikov and Blagoja Markoski with five articles each, while Dimitar Karanfilovski and Vasa Daskalovski each contributed four articles. Aleksandar Stojmilov and Dejan Iliev authored three articles each, whereas Aslan Selmani contributed two articles related to spatial planning. In addition to these authors, a considerable number of researchers contributed to the field through a single publication. To improve the clarity and readability of the graphical presentation, only authors with two or more publications were included in the analysis presented in Figure 3.

Thematic distribution of spatial planning articles

To obtain a clearer overview of the research orientation of the identified articles, a thematic classification was conducted. The analyzed papers were grouped into several spatial planning themes according to their dominant research focus, including

land use, population, settlements, infrastructure, rural and urban planning, tourism, environment, and a separate category labeled “Other” which is explained below. The thematic distribution of the identified articles is presented in Figure 4.

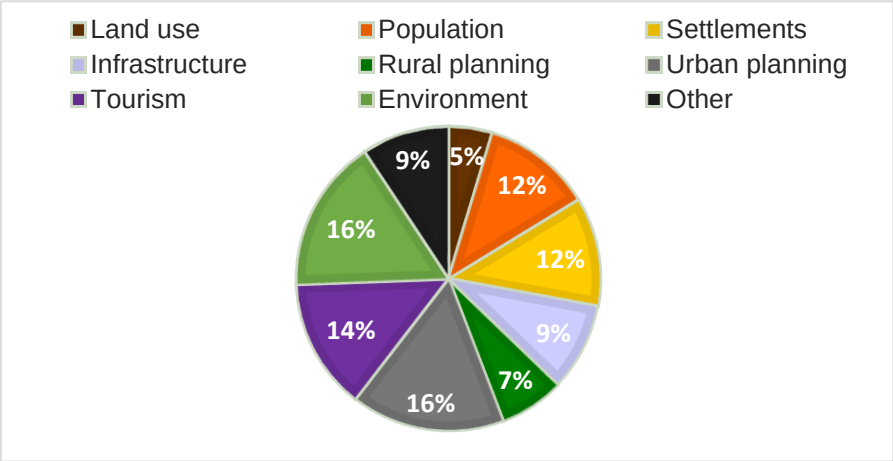


Figure 4. Thematic structure of articles related to spatial planning published in *Geographical Reviews* **Source:** authors’ own elaboration

Figure 4 presents the thematic distribution of articles related to spatial planning published during the analyzed period. Urban planning and environmental topics are the most represented research themes, each accounting for 7 scientific papers or 16% of the total number of analyzed articles. Tourism-related topics follow with 6 papers (14%), while studies focused on population and settlements in spatial planning account for 5 papers each (12%).

Furthermore, papers related to infrastructure represent 9% of the total sample (4 papers), followed by rural planning with 3 papers (7%) and land use with 2 papers (5%). A separate category labeled “Other” was also identified, consisting of 4 scientific papers (9%). This category includes papers that cannot be clearly classified within the previously defined thematic groups, such as studies related to spatial planning policies, legislation, methodological issues, and regional spatial plans.

To identify thematic changes over time, the classified articles were further analyzed according to the seven defined periods. Figure 5 shows the number of published articles within each thematic category across the analyzed periods. Each column is divided into segments representing the thematic structure of the articles published within the corresponding period.

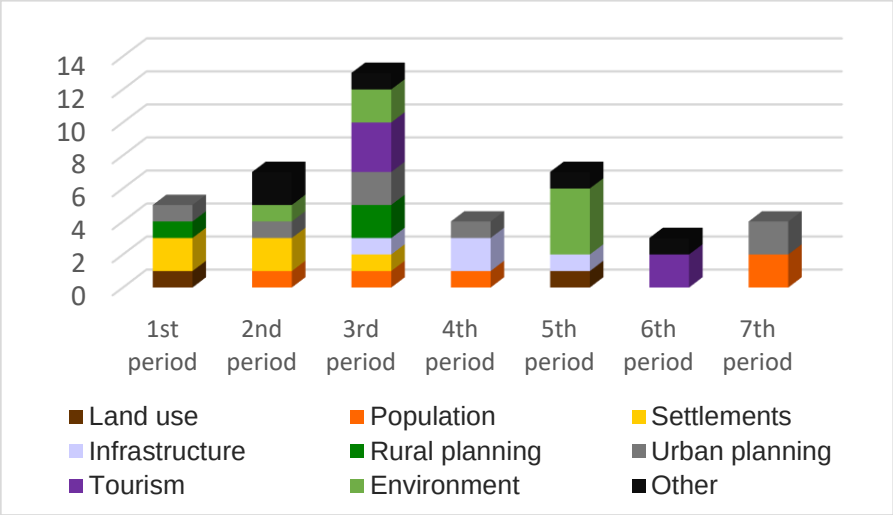


Figure 5. Distribution of spatial planning articles by thematic categories in *Geographical Reviews* (1962–2025) **Source:** authors' own elaboration

For example, the first period (1962–1969) includes one scientific paper each dedicated to land use, rural and urban planning, as well as two papers focused on settlements in spatial planning. The second period (1970–1979) shows certain similarities, with one paper related to urban planning and two papers dedicated to settlements. Population emerged as a spatial planning factor with one scientific paper, while it is particularly interesting that the first paper dedicated to environmental issues in spatial planning published in *Geographical Reviews* appeared exactly 50 years ago, in 1976. Furthermore, the second period also includes two papers classified within the "Other" category, focusing on methodological issues and regional spatial planning.

The third period (1980–1989) includes papers from all nine defined thematic categories, with the exception of land use. The greatest research focus during this period was placed on tourism in spatial planning, represented by a total of three scientific papers. Environmental topics, along with rural and urban planning, followed with two papers each.

The fourth period (1990–1999) consists of only four scientific papers, with the strongest research focus placed on infrastructure-related issues in spatial planning. The two papers specifically examine the road network and its influence on spatial organization, while the remaining two studies focus on population and urban planning.

The fifth period (2000–2009) is characterized by the dominance of papers dedicated to environmental issues in spatial planning, with a total of four scientific papers. This also represents the largest segment within the chart, indicating a particularly strong research orientation toward a specific thematic field. The remaining papers belong to the domains of land use and infrastructure, along with

one paper dedicated to the Law on Territorial Organization of the Republic of Macedonia adopted in 2004. The sixth period (2010–2019) comprises only three scientific papers, mainly dedicated to tourism-related issues.

The last period (2020–2025), which is still ongoing, comprises four scientific papers with an equal representation of population and urban planning topics. During this period, legislative and planning activities are underway in the country, including the preparation of a new law on spatial planning and a new national spatial plan. Considering the growing relevance of spatial planning issues, these developments may contribute to an increase in spatial planning research by the end of the decade. Particular growth may be expected in multi-thematic studies addressing sustainable urban development, environmental protection, and related planning challenges.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of spatial planning research published in *Geographical Reviews* between 1962 and 2025 reveals several important features of the field in North Macedonia. When examining temporal trends, it is evident that the number of spatial planning articles does not follow a continuous upward trajectory but rather fluctuates across decades. Sharifi et al. (2023), in their bibliometric review of urban studies and regional and urban planning literature from 1956 to 2022, identified a rapid increase in scientific production over the study period. Similar results were reported by Paul et al. (2025), whose bibliometric analysis identified substantial growth in peri-urban research publications between 1976 and 2023. In contrast, the peak of publications in *Geographical Reviews* occurred during the 1980s, followed by periods of decline and stagnation.

A different pattern is observed in authorship trends. Four of the five co-authored articles in *Geographical Reviews* were published recently (2015–2025), reflecting an increase in collaborative research activity. This finding is consistent with the results of Ho et al. (2026), who found that the average number of authors per publication in urban studies and planning research increased from 1.6 to 3.2 between 1991 and 2021. The predominance of single-author publications in earlier periods suggests that spatial planning research in North Macedonia has traditionally been conducted individually, likely due to the small size of the research community and limited institutional collaboration.

The results from *Geographical Reviews* indicate a strong focus on urban and environmental planning. This finding is consistent with the bibliometric analysis conducted by Sareen and Haque (2023), which identified environmental issues and sustainable peri-urban development as major research themes. In addition, tourism-related studies represent another important thematic group within *Geographical Reviews.* This observation is consistent with the findings of Krabokoukis and Polyzos (2023), whose bibliometric analysis revealed an increasing integration of tourism development, urban planning, and sustainability.

Overall, the findings indicate that, despite the relatively limited number of

publications, *Geographical Reviews* reflects several trends observed in international spatial planning literature, including the growing importance of collaborative research and the increasing attention devoted to environmental and urban planning issues. At the same time, the fluctuations in publication output and the limited representation of certain thematic areas reveal specific characteristics of the Macedonian scientific context and point to potential directions for future research.

CONCLUSION

This study provided a bibliometric overview of spatial planning research in the Republic of North Macedonia, focusing on publications in *Geographical Reviews* from 1962 to 2025. The analysis identified temporal fluctuations in publication output, a predominance of single-author papers in earlier periods with a recent increase in collaborative research, and a thematic focus on urban planning, environmental issues, and tourism. These findings demonstrate the contribution of *Geographical Reviews* in documenting the evolution of spatial planning research and highlight the alignment of Macedonian research with broader international trends.

However, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. The main limitation of this study is that the analysis is restricted to a single national journal, which may not fully represent the entirety of spatial planning research conducted in North Macedonia. In addition, the scope of the dataset limited the application of advanced bibliometric techniques, such as co-authorship and citation network analysis, keyword co-occurrence matrices, and specialized software packages including VOSviewer and Bibliometrix. Furthermore, the thematic classification was based on manual coding, which introduces a degree of subjectivity.

To build upon this study, future research could expand the analysis to include all Macedonian geographical journals, as well as regional and international publications, in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of spatial planning research. Employing advanced bibliometric tools and network analysis software could enable more detailed co-word, co-authorship, and citation analyses. Comparative studies involving neighboring countries or the broader Balkan region could further contribute to understanding the position and development of Macedonian spatial planning research within the regional scientific context. Additionally, investigating emerging topics and interdisciplinary collaborations would offer valuable insights into the evolving research priorities and existing knowledge gaps within the field.

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ПРОСТОРНОТО ПЛАНИРАЊЕ ВО ГЕОГРАФСКИТЕ РАЗГЛЕДИ (1962–2025): БИБЛИОМЕТРИСКА И ТЕМАТСКА АНАЛИЗА

АПСТРАКТ

Просторното планирање е систем на сеопфатно планирање и организација насочен кон постигнување оптимална рамнотежа помеѓу повеќе просторни и функционални димензии. И покрај тоа што е интердисциплинарна и актуелна научна област, постои недостиг од студии кои го анализираат специфичниот содржински фокус на истражувањата во просторното планирање, особено на национално ниво во Република Северна Македонија. За да се пополни оваа празнина, ова истражување го анализира развојот на истражувањата во областа на просторното планирање во Република Северна Македонија преку анализа на трудови објавени во списанието *Географски Разгледи* во периодот од 1962 до 2025 година. Применет е библиометриски пристап, комбиниран со рачно извршена тематска класификација, со цел да се идентификуваат објавувачките трендови, авторската застапеност и главните истражувачки теми. Анализата ги опфати сите 58 броја на списанието, при што беа идентификувани 43 научни трудови директно поврзани со просторното планирање. Трудовите беа селектирани преку релевантни клучни зборови во наслови, апстракти и, по потреба, во целиот текст. Потоа беа класифицирани според нивниот тематски фокус во неколку категории, вклучувајќи користење на земјиштето, население, населби, инфраструктура, рурално и урбано планирање, животна средина, туризам и други релевантни теми.

Временската анализа покажува дека обемот на истражувања во областа на просторното планирање во *Географските Разгледи* не е рамномерно распределен низ

анализираниот период. Највисоко ниво на истражувачка продукција е забележано во 1980-тите години, што укажува на период на засилена научна активност, додека периодот од 2010 до 2019 година се карактеризира со намалена истражувачка продукција. Во поновите години се забележува зголемување на бројот на објавени трудови, што укажува на обновен научен интерес за прашањата од просторното планирање. Тематската анализа покажува доминација на студии од областа на урбаното планирање и животната средина, по што следуваат истражувања поврзани со туризмот и социо-географските аспекти на просторот.

Спроведеното истражување ја потврдува важната улога на списанието *Географски Разгледи* во документирањето на еволуцијата на истражувањата во просторното планирање и географската мисла во Република Северна Македонија. Со оглед на сè поголемото значење на одржливиот просторен развој, заштитата на животната средина и современите урбани предизвици, се очекува понатамошен раст на научните истражувања во оваа област.

Клучни зборови: просторно планирање, *Географски Разгледи*, библиометриска анализа, тематска анализа, Северна Македонија