

Planning and Architecture in Greece in the Neoliberal Era

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Abstract:

The first decade of the 2000s was an extremely interesting period for Athens which repeatedly captured the world's attention for several reasons. The capital of Greece welcomed the mixed blessing of the Summer Olympic Games of 2004, was faced with major riots during December 2008 and became the focal point of the country's financial crisis; this latter event, igniting extensive protests and demonstrations culminating in the "indignants" movement in the summer of 2011. Today, Athens is experiencing a severe deadlock; neglect and deterioration of the city centre; the establishment of immigrant ghettos; the severing of social fabric; the decomposition of the middle class; the perceived breach of security; and increasing homelessness.

Over the past decade the tradition established with the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974, of considering the city and its infrastructure as a 'public asset', has been overturned. This was most notable during the preparations for the Summer Olympics between 2000 and 2004 during which a new emergency statutory framework for urban planning was introduced in the name of speed and efficiency. For the first time, public works, state property and enterprises of public interest were privatised. However, the end of the Games did not initiate a return to the former public status quo. On the contrary, the financial crisis that occurred a few years later promoted the 2004 'emergency' model to the position of permanent planning policy. More recently in 2010 and 2011, a series of new laws have been added to this which essentially abolish the state's position of primacy in urban planning decisions, eliminate public consultation at local government level, and reduce environmental and archaeological controls. In short, the private sector has been allowed to establish land-uses that have transgressed previous town planning and environmental norms. At the same time, these laws transfer state land assets to the newly founded Asset Development Fund so as to contribute towards the reduction of the country's international debt. The consequences of this deregulation have been profound.

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Badseed, *Barricade at Stournari street during Athens riots, 2008.*

Economic crisis and reform

The first decade of the 2000s was an extremely interesting period for Athens which repeatedly captured the world's attention for several reasons. The capital of Greece welcomed the mixed blessing of the Summer Olympic Games of 2004, was faced with major riots during December 2008 and became the focal point of the country's financial crisis; this latter event, igniting extensive protests and demonstrations culminating in the "indignants" movement in the summer of 2011. Today, Athens is experiencing a severe deadlock; neglect and deterioration of the city centre; the establishment of immigrant ghettos; the severing of social fabric; the decomposition of the middle class; the perceived breach of security; and increasing homelessness.

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Politics, economic models, law-making and the evolution of space regulation concepts

Urban space has always been inextricably linked to social, political and economic processes and phenomena. Planning, as a ‘science’ for example, emerged as a way of addressing the variety of issues related to rapid and large-scale urbanization. The complex system of institutions, processes and implementation tools it encompasses today, are generally intended to produce policies and plans that serve the ‘public interest’. On the other hand however, planning can also be seen as a means to exercise power; as it has direct consequences on the economic, social, political and cultural life of the locality it concerns.

The history of planning as an exercise in control and power in Greece is different to that of other countries in the developed world. It is directly linked to the peculiarities of the Greek capitalist system and the resulting specifics of the urbanisation processes of Greek cities – which only really began after 1922[1] with the settlement of Greek refugees from Asia Minor. Until the end of the Second World War, most Greek cities did not possess large-scale manufacturing plants and were not subject to the pressures of industrial concentration. One consequence of this was that Modern Movement concepts concerning rational town-planning had little impact on planning decision-making processes until quite late.

Up until the post WWII period there had been a number of proposals and regulatory plans for Athens which were deemed to be either fragmentary, or not flexible enough to foresee demographic changes (as in the case of the settlement of the refugees resulting from the Greek-Turkish population exchange in the 1920s). Alternatively, they were simply seen as too unrealistic due to the meagre financial means available for their implementation. These plans for the city go back to the early nineteenth century but continued throughout the twentieth, with the last ones of note being the Spatial Plan and Program for the Capital City by Doxiadis Associates in 1976 and the Athens Regulatory Plan of 1985.[2]

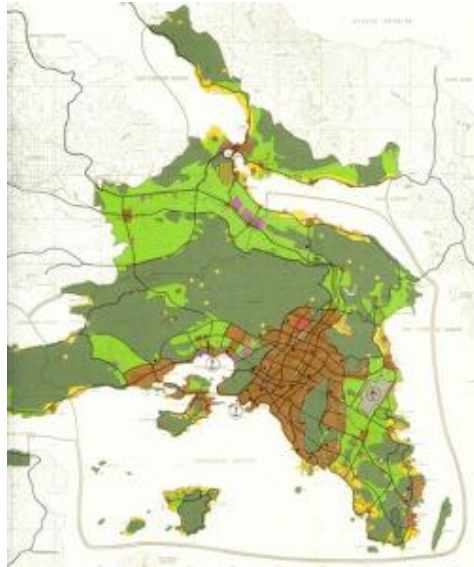


Fig. 1. Spatial Plan and Program for the Capital City, Doxiadis Associates (1976).

The post-war period, and especially the 1960s, marked the golden age of the Greek capitalist system and resulted in unprecedented economic growth and immense urbanisation. It was then that debates on the need for realistic planning were revived and several institutions were established to deal with the issue. The military junta (1967-1974) brought forward two laws that aimed to modernise the existing statutory framework,[3] both of which became active after the fall of the regime. Other laws were introduced a few years later, supplanting those of the junta and presenting the notion of ‘regulatory plans that would be self-funded through their own implementation’.[4] Improper functioning of planning institutions and the non-, or partial, implementation of these plans however, meant that it was not until 1985 that any real restrictions were imposed on land use or building construction.[5]The resulting chaotic framework was essentially one of no control, as it permitted a selective application of regulations.

The Athens Regulatory Plan (1985)

After the socialist party came to power in 1981 a new planning framework was introduced which was in tune with the new political agenda and prioritised processes of public participation and consultation.[6] It also promoted the concept of a more equitable distribution of the profit generated from the overvaluation of urban land after its inclusion into the city plan.[7] The Athens Regulatory Plan was made a state law in 1985,[8] and saw the introduction of the generalised application of local plans, both for cities and the rural areas surrounding them.[9] Fig. 2. Some of the most important aims set out in the 1985 plan include; a. the stabilisation of the urban population with a view to its gradual decrease; b. the control of the capital city’s economic activity; c. the restraint of the territorial expansion of the city; d. the statutory protection of coastal areas and the prohibition of building activity along it; e. the implementation of effective land-use control and; f. the organisation of a uniform transport system.[10]

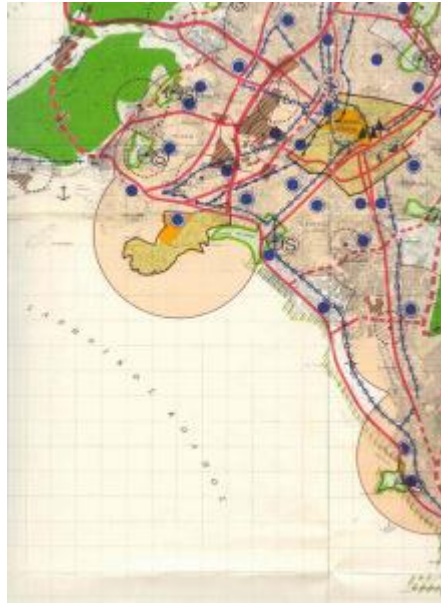


Fig 2. Aspect of the Athens Regulatory Plan. Ministry of Urban Planning, Ekistics and Environment (1985)

Despite the introduction of this law however, the 1985 domestic financial crisis brought the state to the brink of bankruptcy. This coincided with the European Economic Community's shift towards neoliberal policies and the subsequent agreement of the member states on the liberalisation of markets, goods, services and capital. These two events led to the introduction of austerity measures and rendered any chance of obtaining the financial backing necessary for the regulatory plan practically impossible. In addition, prohibition of illicit building, as described in the regulatory plan, triggered a series of domestic reactions which further impacted negatively on the possibilities for its implementation.[11] Given this climate, it is no surprise that the 1985 plan was never fully implemented. It became a utopian goal for future planners and has become a standard pre-election pledge for politicians ever since.

Changes in economic principles: Towards a more liberal market economy and the Olympics

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the fall of the communist bloc and the failure of state controlled capitalism. This led to the doctrine of the 'market economy' being seen as the only viable alternative, and thus becoming the unquestionable context in which the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 was debated and passed. It represented a new stage in European integration and saw new limits placed on independent exchange and monetary policy at national levels. At the time, the Greek state made every effort to be incorporated into the core of this new European monetary system, despite the fact that major financial problems had already accumulated over the previous decades. As a result of these efforts free market economic practices and programs were implemented such as a reduction of the public deficit, general deregulation, privatisations of state-run corporations and the sale of state property.[12] All of this followed the widely propagated notion that the reason for the problems of the Greek economy was 'the wasteful and counterproductive expansion of the public sector'.[13]

The successful bid for the hosting of the 2004 Summer Olympics in 1997 was considered a rare opportunity for economic growth on the one hand, and the incorporation of Greek cities into the global cities' network on the other.[14] The recently adopted regulatory plan of 1985 did not however, foresee the accommodation of activities and land uses associated with such a mega-event. Consequently, the already debilitated and weakened plan was unable to meet the new goals. However, since time was a critical factor for meeting the criteria of the 2004 candidacy file, the necessary interventions were realised without updating the existent regulatory framework. Furthermore, no attempt was made to compile a new plan that would meet the new demands but rather, an emergency law was adopted in 1999 for the planning of the Olympic facilities.[15] Its major objective was the reduction of the time and paperwork required for the realisation of infrastructure projects. Although it was referred to as an 'update' of the regulatory plan, in essence, it was the quite opposite- it represented its abolition.

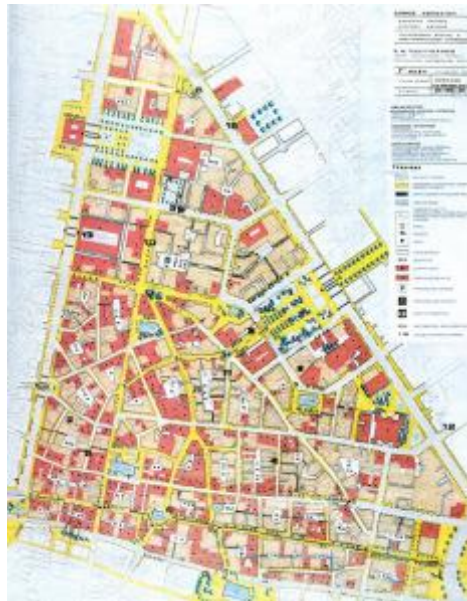


Fig. 3. Aravantinos et al, Master Plan for the Historical Centre of Athens, Urban Research Laboratory, School of Architecture, NTUA (1996): Proposal

The hosting of the 2004 summer Olympics signified a new era in Greek planning history and the emergency laws and statutes that followed marked a transition from universal design, (which was until then considered to be the norm), to strategic planning. The implications however, were more severe than just a shift in planning priorities, as the organisation of the summer Olympics deeply affected the overall structure of the state. Timely construction of the required infrastructure gave the necessary pretext for the adoption of (neoliberal) policies and, in that sense, the summer Olympics became a means to an end. That end, was the adaptation to the neoliberal model and the gradual transformation of existing state structures. Greece, a small-scale and failing economy already a core member of the European Union,[16] thus irreversibly changed its state structure so as to align with the established economic trends of the times.

Changes in state structures and priorities: from protection from private misconduct to the effective development of state property and the Olympic Legacy

During this period several public organisations and institutions were forcibly incorporated into the private sphere and made into societies anonymes (S.A.). Such companies included the ‘Public Properties Company S.A.’[17] which had a portfolio of 379 assets covering a total area of 7,000 hectares. These assets included hotels, marinas, beaches, mountain slopes and caves.[18] Another company was the ‘Olympic Properties S.A.’ which, prior to its 2011 merger, was responsible for the management, use and exploitation of many of the former Olympic venues at the end of the Games. Interestingly however, it was not subject to any parliamentary control and, at the end of the Games, the company proceeded to lease Olympic facilities to private entrepreneurial consortia that offered no benefit to the public whatsoever. Consequently, under the guise of turning Athens into a metropolitan tourist and investment centre, zones of uncontrollable private profit were gradually cemented throughout the city. [19]

In addition, several private or semi-private investment consortia claimed an unprecedented share in planning and decision making processes during this period of ‘reform’, with Public & Private Partnerships (PPPs) being the most obvious.[20] Under the laws introduced to foment these partnerships, a project realised under its umbrella belongs exclusively to the private partner throughout the duration of the contract. The private partner is thus able to either rent it privately, or rent it back to the public sector, so that the latter can make it available to its citizens.[21]

Despite the tight schedule for construction, and the long term consequences of the planning laws introduced in the build-up to the Games, a number of impressive buildings were constructed and important infrastructure projects realised. [22] However, after the Games many of these projects were simply put to use in private ventures such as the conversion of the Olympic Media Village into the Athens Mall-the first shopping centre of its kind in Athens.[23] The International Broadcasting Centre[24] was converted into another mall-type investment, The Athens Golden Hall and is managed by the same company that controls the Athens Mall. The Agios Kosmas Sailing Centre became a marina for tourist and private yachts that restricted public access to the waterfront, while the disused ‘Ellinikon’, Athens’ former airport, hosted a number of outdoor and indoor sporting events before becoming the subject of an international architectural competition for a public park in 2005.[25] This public project was never realised and, despite a local and national protest in favour of a public green scheme, Ellinikon is now up for full privatisation in an attempt to relieve the public debt.



Fig 4. N. Belavilas et al, Master Plan of Ellinikon Former Airport Metropolitan Park of Athens, Urban Environment Laboratory, School of Architecture, NTUA (2010): Proposal

Law no. 3894/2010 – the end of planning

These attempts to move the Greek economy towards liberalism are underpinned by law no.3894/2010. This law on ‘the acceleration and transparency of strategic investments’ is more colloquially known as ‘fast-track’. Its aim is to accelerate and simplify the necessary processes required for the realisation of large investment projects and is again premised on the idea that the existing bureaucratic system was responsible for limited investments in the Greek economy. In addition to reducing bureaucracy, ‘fast-track’ challenges existing planning practices previously hailed as successes in that, ‘for reasons pertaining the overriding public interest’, it allows for exemptions from building controls and restrictions.[26] Furthermore, and in order to make the investment climate as attractive as possible, all auxiliary works and services required to render the investment successful must be executed by the state (or the broader public sector) as a matter of priority. According to the (amended) civil servants code, failure to do so even entails penalties and sanctions to individuals or relevant public bodies. [27]

All of this clearly loosened planning controls over a number of years. However, their effective abolition was ultimately achieved by the specification and implementation of the Special Integrated Development Plans of 2010.[28] This law unambiguously allows the government to overrule existing laws in favour of private development.[29] As with Law no.3894/2010, these decisions are ratified by Presidential decree following recommendations by the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change and by the Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks. They can not only supersede older decisions, they can bypass parliamentary debate.[30] Recent legal provisions then, enhance the possibilities of large scale capital, but virtually abolish any planning controls or limitations of private developments. One may argue that planning, in traditional terms at least, is over. It certainly appears that urban transformation will not now follow the aspirations of parliament controlled collective bodies but rather, will be the result of the incidental flow of domestic and foreign capital.[31]

Changes in the nature of the architectural profession in the post Olympic period

Due to the almost exclusively touristic aims of the Olympic Games, the broader city centre and its ‘everyday’ neighbourhoods were neglected. The prioritisation of private interests over public needs, and the absence of public interventions with any social content, has resulted in the accumulation of structural social problems that are leading to the social disintegration of the city centre. Gradual population decline, the emergence of ghettos and an increase in vacant buildings all began to raise concern only three years after the Games. As a result, the dominant public discourse on downtown areas began to change. The formerly euphoric tone suddenly altered and fear and suspicion were propagated, primarily by the media, who described drug addiction, homelessness and illegal immigration on these areas in the grimmest of terms.[32]

Despite the clear contextual background to these issues, the dominant political discourse insists that the problems that exist are limited to specific building blocks and particular streets and, furthermore, that solutions are a matter of architectural and urban regeneration projects. Three misconceptions are propagated by these arguments; that local issues are unrelated to broader ones, namely economic concerns; that law enforcement is a long term solution; and of most interest in our context, that social problems demand physical and spatial solutions. Although planning may have a role to play in solving these problems, these arguments divorce it from the deregulatory neoliberal policies that are causing the issues in the first place.

The weakening of the small practice – and the need to adjust or to react?

The emergence of these social issues is not the only result of the recent changes to the dominant economic model and the planning system in Greece. They have also induced significant change in the nature and structure of commercial practices in recent years. Sole practitioners and small-scale offices have traditionally comprised the backbone of the local practicing architectural community, and it is this scale of architectural practice that has been most directly affected by the changing situation.[33] While access to public projects has always been limited and difficult, in the current neoliberal climate today, it is practically non-existent; recent amendments to design and construction legislation clearly favour ‘flexible’ large architectural studios over ‘unproductive’ and ‘cumbersome’ small practices. Indeed, the terminology used in government policy documents demonstrates this in its description of a preference for the ‘establishment of groups and companies that will have permanent staff and will be able to undertake the complete study of a technical project’.[34]

In this context, in which the establishment of a minimum fee structure has also been abolished, a large portion of the work currently carried out by sole practitioners is not related to architectural design at all. Many sole-architects are now regulating and implementing the documentation of illicit buildings and undeclared flat spaces. It is an activity that has fallen to the small practices due to the small profit margins it offers and, in addition to reducing the income of architects, it also turns them into bureaucrats specialised in the implementation of the state’s emergency tax measures. As such, it renders them ‘ethically complicit’ with private, semi-legal developments that, in many cases, contribute to the further

deterioration of urban, rural and natural landscape.

The entry of real-estate and land speculation into the reality of architectural practice at this level has undeniably induced ideological confusion – intentionally or not. Sole practitioners and small practices that wish to break free from the limits of this restricted professional activity are left with only one alternative; to align themselves with the aims of large scale capital. The partnership between small professional formations and big businesses is particularly beneficial to the latter, as it provides the necessary moral and social legitimisation of their larger investment schemes; projects that are besieging mid-sized plots, or even whole areas, both inside or outside city limits. Whilst these projects are on a smaller scale than the aforementioned Olympic and strategic projects, they are equally motivated, in the long run, by private gain.

Of course, in this environment of limited professional potential, young architects and small practices may accept the opportunities offered by large investment schemes to develop their ideas, often in the context of particularly interesting projects involving neglected historic areas whose regeneration can have a profound community impact.. One example of this is the project to regenerate the historical downtown areas of Keramikos and Metaxourgeio, led by the private consortium Oliaros. This privately led project has already restored several ageing properties and has acquired a large proportion of the derelict heritage stock. In addition, it claims it will develop more of its properties when the state has completed its part of the regeneration initiative, namely, alterations to land use definitions and the introduction of laws to limit traffic and allow for the pedestrianisation of walkways.

The aim of Oliaros is to redefine the existing character of the area by introducing a new cultural and urban identity model and, to this end, it has established an NGO that aims to attract community support. Its communication strategy includes the organisation of artistic events, architectural competitions and urban-design studies, and has participated in research programmes with foreign universities. It also exerts pressure on local and central government institutions to include their independent proposals into various European programmes and broader planning strategies.

Noteworthy small practices have already joined forces with this group and have produced remarkable projects and studies. However, the tactics employed raise questions that relate to the broader role of both architecture and architects nowadays, as well as the necessity of such initiatives. The architectural community stands divided on this issue in Greece. Large scale capital may be able to promote high quality architecture, but such projects inevitably lose any claim to genuine grassroots origin and control, despite their alleged social aims, as in the case of Oliaros. Criticisms from architects opposing projects such as these focus on their gentrifying architecture, contemporary art and alternative lifestyle formula – a formula that often pushes poorer people out of the developed area as property values increase.

Whilst this type of project involves the adaptation of architects to their new conditions, there are examples of outright resistance to the advance of market economy practices as well. One such example is the case of a refugee housing complex in Alexandras Avenue- a group of eight functionalist buildings of great architectural and cultural significance which currently accommodates low-income dwellers and squatters. During the 1990s, the ministry of Public Works and the Public Real Estate Corporation began expropriating individual apartments, gradually, so as to eventually gain ownership of four of the buildings

in question.

Their ultimate aim was to demolish the whole complex and open the cleared plot to private development. However, a huge campaign began to save these buildings under the umbrella of conservation as they are unique examples of modernism in the heart of Athens. Pro-preservation groups included local residents, various public bodies, the Association of Architects and the Athens School of Architecture. Pro-demolition groups included the local and central government, and private investment companies that had already compiled development strategies for the broader area. Controversy over the future of the complex took many forms, including both court appeals and violent street clashes.

In 2003, the Central Council of Modern Monuments of the Ministry of Culture, in line with the local and central government views on the facilitation of private investment initiatives, proposed statutory protection for only two of the eight buildings of the complex. It was only due to the pro-preservation parties' appeal to the Council of State, and its subsequent decision to annul the ministry of Culture's partial listing, that the totality of the complex remained intact. Immediately after the Council of State's decision, the Central Council of Modern Monuments re-examined the case and, in 2008, decided on the final and irreversible statutory protection of all eight buildings of the complex. Of course, the preservation and promotion of the complex is not yet certain but, as a listed monument, it is at least safe from demolition. It is an example of how the architecture profession and citizens themselves are standing directly against the neoliberal changes affecting planning and development in Athens through direct resistance and collective protest.

Dilemmas for architectural education in a changing reality

The question for architects is whether to oppose the demands of the new economic conditions or not. It is a question that divides the architectural community down the middle. One of the reasons for this split perhaps, is the educational tradition in Greece and the emphasis it places on the social roles and social responsibilities of architects. This educational tradition, that has nurtured generations of students, is currently challenged from both within and without. The reasons for the challenge are the same as those affecting practice-deregulation and a neoliberal economy.

The door to neoliberalism in education has been opened by the government's attempts to remove article 16 from the Greek Constitution on the public and free-of-charge character of all levels of education—something that would almost certainly result in the establishment of private universities.[35] The establishment of private universities is a taboo in Greece as the possible introduction of tuition fees raises the question of the right of access to education. Furthermore, the models of private education that are being discussed promote a market oriented education that links learning with 'useful knowledge'-a template that is considered as a diversion from the broader academic ideals that have traditionally underpinned the Greek education system.

Those ideals are, in general, an open-ended view of education as an endeavour to foment critical individuals with broad based knowledge, skills and sensibilities. In architecture this has meant the establishment of a broad and interdisciplinary curriculum that encompasses and reconciles elements of the

humanities, the social and natural sciences, technology and the arts. It is the general view inside the academy that architectural education should have a holistic approach and be diverse. It should aim to develop the aesthetic and compositional ability of its students and ensure their acquisition of solid technical and design knowledge while, at the same time, facilitating their understanding of external fields such as sociology and psychology. Consequently, programs of study have been developed to cover areas such as architectural and urban design, landscape and environmental design, construction and building technology, town and regional planning, as well as the arts and the humanities.[36]

While the emphasis on the arts, humanities, construction and architectural design have long formed part of design education in Greece, the emergence of urban design, town and regional planning as subjects has been a more recent phenomenon. In particular, the gradual decline of post-war construction and building in the 1970s and 1980s induced reflection and critical thinking on the abrupt and uncontrolled transformation of the image, shape and functions of the city. It resulted in the introduction of wider aims for the architectural profession and education and the curricula that evolved as a result moved along the following axes: the growing significance of humanities; the growing importance of technology and the evolution of fine arts; and the shift of the architectural focus from the object to the landscape – including the city.[37]

This interdisciplinary and broad based view of education is today being called into question as ‘vocational teaching’ and is being given more priority as a way of meeting the ‘alleged’ needs of industry. Neoliberal ideological demands in architectural education then, are not only questioning the financial model of education but also its curriculum. It seeks to fragment the architectural discipline into separate fields of knowledge, with the parallel depreciation of some and promotion of others. As a result of this for example, planning, building preservation, landscape architecture and interior design have been established as independent disciplines run in separate academic departments within universities, Technological Educational Institutes and in private educational institutions.

The motives behind this are to be found in industry’s desire to have specialist workers rather than broader critical thinkers. It results in the fragmentation of knowledge and a limited understanding of the range of issues related to architecture, planning and design in general – issues that often require an in-depth knowledge of disciplines such as economics, the arts and the social sciences. Specialised programs may provide qualified professionals in their particular science, but they fail to promote either integrated knowledge or the social responsibilities that were once at the heart of Greek architectural, planning and design education. These specialised programs could neutralise the ideological, political and social contents of education as an integrated whole.

Just at the moment when Greece needs its academics to be able to examine the problems created by the deregulation of the planning system, the economy at large, and their implications for the built environment, they are subject to the same forces that lead to short term thinking and isolated profit orientated actions. It is a situation that limits the ability of the academy to respond, as it is busy defending itself and its model of learning. Despite this, universities are still responding. Debates are held, conferences organised, papers are published and books are still written. More specifically, design projects are still set that encourage students to deal with social issues and think more broadly about what factors

are at play.

Urban Design Student Projects at the National Technical University of Athens

If we consider student design projects in planning for example, they still tend to place great importance on promoting the qualities of existing urban environments, detailed urban living analysis and the creation of infrastructures that may help a given region or area economically and socially. What is sought is the complete understanding of the relationship between parts and the whole; an understanding of built form and un-built voids; of the function, development and future prospects of existing building blocks and axes of communication; of the interrelationship between private and public domains; of the urban green and much more.

Projects are often directed to interventions of varying scales with the aim of linking the specific with the general both physically and more conceptually. In this context, students are encouraged to propose new forms of dwelling, commerce, recreation and workspaces, as well as to develop a deep understanding of local and metropolitan centres. Covering this range of factors foments cross-disciplinary thinking by addressing issues of architecture, planning and economics and is reinforced by working at different scales. In the context of projects set by the School of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens for example, the areas studied can range between 2 to 5 hectares in size and proposals are designed at various scales. As a result, students consider a whole range of issues and factors that influence the specifics of living. One example is a project for the former industrial zone of Agios Dionysios, Piraeus.

Ideas for the regeneration of Agios Dionysios

Agios Dionysios is one of the most dramatically and fast changing zones of Piraeus' port area. The area's contemporary identity was determined by two critical factors: deindustrialisation that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s and the re-adaptation of the port's industrial character to passenger only use that began in the 1980s and was completed in 2003 with the relocation of commercial and customs activity to a new port to the west. As industrial plants closed down one after the other, Agios Dionysios gradually became a huge derelict brown-field area. Attempts to redefine its new role were included in the Athens Regulatory Plan (1985), the Piraeus General Urban Plan (1988), and three specially compiled urban studies between 1992 and 1994.[38]

In the 1990s shipping companies began to use the vacant buildings and plots on the water side of the port while other companies began to use vacant industrial buildings and plots further inland. This resulted in an informal mono-functional zone along the waterfront that became a 'barrier' with peculiar urban qualities and an uncertain future. A disused railway line also runs through the area and further separates the former industrial area and adds to the sense of urban fragmentation and exclusion that now characterises it.

The projects set for students were aimed at achieving both a functional and morphological regeneration of the area and, as a result, students were encouraged to introduce new uses and building forms so as to re-

articulate the character and image of the area. They engaged with the site on two distinct but related levels: functional, economic and social restructuring and formal and structural alterations to the particular built environment. The project aimed to focus on the axis along the disused railway tracks at a depth of one to two urban blocks with a chain of selected local interventions of four or five plots neighbouring to the railway corridor. It aimed at incorporating new uses compatible to dwelling and reintegrating the railway corridor back into the urban fabric (by using it as a basis for a sustainable green strategy). Furthermore, it sought to devise measures that would relieve heavy traffic from and to the port, and to promote means of permeability through the area so as to reconnect the surrounding residential areas with the seafront.

Clearly then, a project like this is not divorced from the social and economic conditions currently faced by Athens or the country in general. It responds directly to them and does so in a way that reveals the importance placed on a global education—an education that allows students to think across scales and disciplines and to see questions of architecture and planning as integrated into a more complex socio-economic and cultural web. However, it is also premised on an awareness of the need for planning to exist as an organised and coherently controlled system that permits isolated problems to be tackled as part of a broader range of policies and plans.

Conclusions

This integration of education into a broader tapestry of socio-political issues is, in many ways, a microcosm of practice. Indeed, education in Greece is subject to many of the same pressures as the architecture and planning professions disciplines today. These pressures have led to the conversion of the emergency measures, implemented after the announcement of the successful 2004 Olympic bid, into a permanent model. They are also evident in the proposed measures intended to create a favourable climate for foreign investment—measures that essentially annul planning policy in order to prioritise investment aims. This change of focus has resulted in the degradation and abandonment of downtown areas and the creation of a form of unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

Furthermore, these pressures are seen in the depreciation of the traditional role of the architect, the favouritism shown towards large-scale professional groupings, and the division of the architectural community with regards to how to respond to the changing conditions. In education, they have led to the challenging of the roots of the existing educational tradition and its association of architecture with the arts, humanities and the social sciences. They even threaten the free tuition model that lies at the bedrock of the Greek system. Whether these pressures will prevent architecture and planning from influencing the social and the political, and whether, as a result, these disciplines are doomed to merely reproduce the dominant neoliberal ideology, is yet to be seen.

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[1]The ‘Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations’ (1923) was signed in the aftermath of the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922 and provided for the simultaneous expulsion of Christians from Turkey to Greece and of Moslems from Greece to Turkey.

[2]Briefly, we can mention the most notable plans concerning Athens, named after the institutional bodies or people who compiled them: i. the Kleanthis- Schaubert (1832) and its revision by ii. L.von Klenze (1834) which formed the basis for future plans to come, iii. the Stavridis committee (1860), iv. the S. Leloudas proposal (1919), v. the Kalligas committee (1924), vi. the Planning Service of the Municipality of Athens (1945), vii. the Ministry of Reconstruction proposals (1947), viii. the Athens-Ecumenopolis plan (1960), ix. the Doxiadis Associates spatial plan (1976).

[3]These were the decrees: 1003/1971 ‘On Active Urban Planning’ and 1262/1972 ‘On Regulatory Plans’

[4]These were law no. 947/1979 and law no.341B/2.4.1980

[5]In essence, from 1832 to 1985, land was practically free of land-use regulations and the construction industry operated on it virtually with no restrictions. A similar regime was the norm for building, as myriads of changing legal provisions provided loopholes according to market demands.

[6]The key law in this respect was: Law no.1337/1983

[7]Sariagiannis, G.Τα ρυθμιστικά σχέδια Αθηνών και οι μεταβολές των πλαισίων τους (Regulatory plans for Athens and the transformation of their frameworks). October 11, 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.greekarchitects.gr/gr/αρχιτεκτονικες-ματιες/τα-ρυθμιστικα-σχεδια-αθηνων-και-οι-μεταβολες-των-πλαισιων-τους-id346>

[8]Law no.1515/1985 ‘on the Athens regulatory plan’

[9]General Urban Plans specialise in the organisation and development of space within cities, Urban Control Zones specialise in the constraint of residential zones and space regulation around and in close proximity to cities. In contrast to existing historical plans, the economic feasibility of this particular one, (and future plans to follow for other cities), was already consolidated in the adopted legislation (law no. 947/79 and law no.1337/1983).

[10]Totsikas, P.Αθήνα και ανατολική Αττική: Πραγματικότητες και προοπτικές (“Athens and east Attica: Realities and perspectives”). In Technical Chamber of Greece (ed.), Ένα όραμα για την Αθήνα: η συνέχεια, ο καταστατικός χάρτης, Συνέδριο του ΤΕΕ (A vision for Athens: the follow up, the Charter, TCG Conference) edited by Technical Chamber of Greece, pp. 120-127. Athens: Technical Chamber of Greece, 1996.

[11]Tolerance to illegal building constituted an established practice of the state as it substituted for the lack of a comprehensive housing policy and allowed the development of a ‘clientelist’ relationship with the electoral body. Maloutas, T. La vivienda autopromovida: soluciones de post-guerra en Atenas (“The self-promoted housing solutions in post-war Athens”). Ciudad y Territorio, Tome XXXV, No 136-137, p. 335-345. 2003.

[12]Typical in this sense was the program of economic stabilisation 1991-1993, the program of economic convergence 1993-1998 and the program of economic stability 2000-2004.

[13]Mantouvalou, M. & Balla, E.Μεταλλαγές στο σύστημα γης και οικοδομής και διακυβεύματα του σχεδιασμού στην Ελλάδα σήμερα (“Changes in real estate and building and the planning challenges in Greece”). In Πόλη και χώρος από τον 20ο στον 21ο αιώνα (City and urban space from 20th to 21st century), honorary volume for Emeritus professor A. Aravantinos, pp. 313-330. Athens: NTUA, University of Thessaly, the Greek Association of Urban and Regional Planners, 2004.

[14]Gospodini, A. (2007). Χωρικές πολιτικές για τον σχεδιασμό,

τηνανταγωνιστικότητακαιτηνβιώσιμηανάπτυξητωνελληνικώνπόλεων (“Policies for spatial planning, competitiveness and sustainable development of Greek cities”). Aeihoros, vol.6.1, (2007) p.100-145.

[15]Law no.2730/1999.

[16]In that sense, it is not strange that most of the infrastructure projects were financed from funds coming outside Greece, mainly from the second and third Community Support Framework.

[17]Founded in 1998. The original name was ‘Company for the Development of Greek National Tourism Organisation’s Property’.

[18]Public Properties Company. Assets List. 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.etasa.gr/versions/eng/page.aspx?itemID=SPG183>

[19]Portaliou, E. Αστικός ανασχεδιασμός στην Αθήνα και την ευρύτερη περιφέρεια της Αττικής (UrbanredesignforAthensandtheAtticaprefecture).2007. Retrieved from <http://www.monumenta.org/article.php?IssueID=2&lang=gr&CategoryID=3&ArticleID=75>

[20]Law no.3389/2005 on public and private partnerships promotes unprecedented forms of synergy between public authorities and private enterprises concerning construction, financing, and management of public infrastructure and services.

[21]It is important to mention that contracts following public & private partnerships can be characterised by potential lack of transparency, since there is no provision for parliamentary control. PPPs become thus the means for deeper and more aggressive privatisation of public infrastructure and services.

[22]New gigantic building projects were constructed overnight on greenfield and brownfield sites. The Olympic Village, a new residential area that accommodated the 18,000 athletes and their families, and the Main Press Centre, a building covering a floor area of 52,000sqm, are just two specific examples. New infrastructure projects, such as the new international airport, port extensions, the metro and tram systems, the ring road and new highways, the suburban railway- to name a few, were given priority and were constructed with a specific timeframe in mind. Large and small scale urban interventions transformed the image of the city. The unification of the archaeological spaces transformed the historical core to one of the largest open- air museums and produced high quality urban spaces. Athens was made into a proper European metropolis and found its way into the global cities’ network; object of pride to its residents, of awe to its visitors, of envy to its competitors.

[23]The mall covers a rentable surface of 58,500sqm above ground and offers 90,000sqm of below ground auxiliary and parking space.

[24]This project consists of 83,000sqm above ground and 66,500sqm below ground.

[25]Ellinikon International Airport was Athens’ international airport for sixty years up until 2001. During the Olympics it accommodated several sporting events in brand new purpose made buildings that included: two baseball fields, a Canoe-Kayak Slalom centre and two separate indoor courts. The 2005 competition was intended to turn the whole of the former airport into a metropolitan park, by keeping the newly built sports infrastructure. The competition was organised by the Greek ministry of Environment, the International Union of Architects and the Organisation for the Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens.

[26]Law no.3894/2010, Chapter II ‘Special Conditions’, article 7, paragraph 1.

[27]It should also be noted that favourable treatment to the investor also included the compulsory expropriation of properties or the establishment of rights on real estate in order to serve the investment. As per Law no.3894/2010, Chapter II ‘Special Conditions’, article 10, paragraph 1. The expropriation may even take place prior to the tender. A presidential decree is not required in this case and its pronouncement is ratified by the joint decision of the Ministries of Finance, of Culture and Tourism, of Environment, Energy and Climate Change and of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks, acting in favour of the public interest. Expropriations are deemed to be of ‘urgent and major significance. For their declaration, a simple general plan/ diagram on the horizontal plan shall suffice, its scale thereof not exceeding 1:2000, depicting the area to be expropriated’. As per Law no.3894/2010, Chapter II ‘Special Conditions’, article 10, paragraph 7. It is important to mention, that the law states that in order

to ensure the construction, expansion, modernisation, or service of the investments, expropriations can include wider zones, than just the required area necessary for the realisation of the projects described. For that, again a presidential decree is not required, just a joint decision of the above ministries. As per Law no.3894/2010, Chapter II ‘Special Conditions’, article 10, paragraph 9.

[28]Law no.3894/2010, Chapter VIII, article 24.

[29]The Special Integrated Development Plans become the means to a. Delineate the areas that will accommodate the investment, b. Specify and approve, ‘without prejudice’ of existing plans and laws already in effect regulating spatial development and organisation of the areas in question, c. Enforce special conditions and restrictions to the areas surrounding the strategic investments, in favour of the latter, d. Define the environmental and building conditions for each individual investment.

[30]It is important to highlight the fact that not only do they ‘prevail over any contrary or different regulation’ described in the existing local plans (General Urban Plans, Urban Control Zones, city plans, urban studies, land-use plans), but they are also given the power to initiate presidential decrees to amend the latter, as well.

[31]Ibid note 13, p.314.

[32]Chatzimichalis, K. Το δημόσιο έλλειμμα σχεδιασμού για την πόλη (“The absence of planning for the city”). Ηεποχήonline newspaper. December 19, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.epohi.gr/portal/politiki/10856>

[33]Sole practitioner here is defined as permanent collaborations between individuals, or practices with a limited number of employees. In recent published data (Technical Chamber of Greece- 2009), self employed sole practitioners comprise 63% of the overall practising registered architects, while 17% work in firms. A large proportion of the rest are employed in public sector and a minimum percentage in large practices. As for the nature and size of firms, a similar survey of the Engineers’ Pension Fund (ETAA-TSMEDE) has shown that 5000 out of the 6500 active firms engaged in engineering (including architecture), employ up to three engineers. See: Aggelis, G., Koutsoumpos, L., Kosma, A. and Champaloglou, M. Μικρά Αρχιτεκτονικά Γραφεία: Η σημασία τους σήμερα (“Small architectural practices: their importance today”). In Μικρά αρχιτεκτονικά γραφεία: κοινωνικός ρόλος και επαγγελματική πρακτική (Small architectural practices: social role and professional practice), edited by Network of Small Architectural Practices, pp. 7-16. Athens: Network of small architectural practices, 2011.

[34]Access of sole practitioners and small offices to public works is nowadays constantly diminishing. One reason for this is the gradual dominance of design-and-build system, which is argued to either disregard quality architecture or to confront architecture as a ‘necessary evil’ and compel architects to comply with the desires of the construction company. See: Aggelis, et al, “Small architecture practices: their importance today.”

Another reason is the lack of national competitions which, in the past, have been the means for meritocratic project assignment of public works.

[35]Hellenic Parliament. The Constitution of Greece. 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/f3c70a23-7696-49db-9148-f24dce6a27c8/001-156%20aggliko.pdf>

[36]The growing importance of the humanities in the traditional architectural curriculum, has strengthened the social role of the architect on the one hand, and has broadened its role in academia on the other, by opening up new fields of questioning. Apart from the need of new academics for the new knowledge domains, the diversification of the curriculum has contributed in the birth of a new professional identity, that of the architect- educator, which refers to practising architects with close relations to, or within, academia and combine theory and practice in new innovative directions. In order to serve this professional identity, architecture curricula needed, and still needs, to cultivate architecture further as a body of knowledge, through theory, history, critique and independent thinking.

[37]Kotionis, Z. Η εκπαίδευση ως επινόηση του επαγγέλματος του αρχιτέκτονα (“Education as an invention of the profession of the architect”). In Αρχιτεκτονική Εκπαίδευση και Επαγγελματική Πρακτική (Architectural Education and Professional Practice), edited by G. Simaioforidis, pp. 98-104. Athens: SADAS-PEA and Untimely books, 2002.

[38]These different urban studies were compiled independently by a. the Ministry of Environment Spatial Planning and Public

Works, b. the Municipality of Piraeus, and c. the Piraeus Traders Association.

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